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The UNKNOWN WRESTLER

H. A. CODY

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THE UNKNOWN WRESTLER

H. A. CODY

BY H. A. CODY

UNDER SEALED ORDERS
ROD OF THE LONE PATROL
IF ANY MAN SIN
THE CHIEF OF THE RANGES
THE FOURTH WATCH
THE LONG PATROL
THE FRONTIERSMAN

NEW YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

THE UNKNOWN WRESTLER

BY

H. A. CODY
AUTHOR OF "UNDER SEALED ORDERS,"
"ROD OF THE LONE PATROL," ETC.

L. C.

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GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

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To All
True Wrestlers
this book is
Sympathetically Dedicated

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THE UNKNOWN WRESTLER

CHAPTER I

STREET MUSIC

THERE was no room for him on the sidewalk, so he took up his position beyond the curbstone. The light from the large arc-lamp overhead exposed the old man's thin white hair, withered face and threadbare clothes. His sightless eyes were turned toward the passing throng, and his head was slightly bent in an expectant attitude. But the hand that drew the wheezy bow across the strings of the violin often faltered, and the broken music, instead of attracting, repelled the crowds. The player was tired and longed for rest. But the fire of an overmastering purpose burned in his soul and kept him steadfast to his post.

The girl standing by his side was both weary and embarrassed. Her hand trembled as she held out her father's soft felt hat to receive the coins which were so very few. It was quite evident that she was new to this business, for her cheeks were flushed crimson owing to the remarks she occasionally heard.

"Listen to that old man sawing wood," one gaily-dressed young fop laughingly jested to his companion.

"Filing his saw, I should say," was the sarcastic reply. "It's a wonder to me that such a noise is allowed on a street like this."

"But see the girl," the other insisted; "isn't she a beauty! Look at her cheeks. My! they are some colour. She seems new to her job. Suppose we give her a jolt. I'd like to hear what she'd say. Perhaps she isn't as innocent as she seems."

They had stopped several rods away and were watching the girl as they talked. Presently they retraced their steps, and when they came near where she was standing, one of them surged suddenly against her, causing her to drop the hat in alarm and start back, while the few coins rolled out upon the hard stones. Her cry of dismay caused the old man to stop playing and turn quickly toward her.

"What is the matter, Nan?" he anxiously enquired.

"Oh, let us go away," the girl pleaded. "We are not safe here, and I am so frightened. Two men pushed against me and knocked the hat out of my hand. I know they did it on purpose, for they went away laughing. Oh, what is that?" and she leaned eagerly forward as a commotion took place among the crowd a short distance away.

While the young men were performing their cowardly prank, a man was intently watching all that was taking place. He had been observing the blind violinist and the timid girl for several minutes. In his eyes was an expression of sympathy, which changed at once to intense anger at the act of the two heartless fops. He stepped quickly forward and confronted them.

"What right had you to interfere with that girl?" he demanded.

"It's none of your business," replied the one who had done the deed. "You get out of our way, and do it quick at that, or it won't be well with you."

At once a heavy hand was laid upon his shoulder, and the gripping fingers of that hand caused him to wince and try to tear himself away. A sudden fear smote his heart as he looked up into the blazing eyes of the man before him. He was beginning to respect that towering form with the great broad shoulders and the hand that seemed to weigh a ton and the gripping fingers that were closing like a vise. He suspected that this was a plain-clothes man in the Police service, and the thought filled him with a nameless dread. He glanced around for his companion, but he was nowhere to be seen.

"What do ye want me to do?" he at length gasped.

"Go pick up those coins, and then apologise to the girl for your rudeness," was the reply.

"Good heavens! I can't do that, ye know. What will me chums say?"

"Never mind what they will say. They'll say a great more if I have to drag you there by the coat collar. So get a move on at once."

The victim looked helplessly around upon the crowd which had gathered, as if expecting some assistance. But not a friendly face could he behold. All seemed to be greatly amused at his plight.

"Hurry up."

The voice was calm but the clutching fingers were becoming almost unbearable. There was nothing else for the young man to do, so with a face as pale as death he turned and walked slowly back to where the old violinist and the girl were standing.

"Now, pick up the coins," was the imperious command.

The culprit at once obeyed, and groped around as well as he could but nothing could he find. Several street urchins, who had been ahead of him, now stood near and jeered at his fruitless efforts. At length, straightening himself up, he turned to his captor. The perspiration was streaming down his face, and he looked the picture of misery.

"I can't find anything," he gasped.

"Well, then, apologise to the girl. Tell her you are sorry for what you did and that you will never do such a thing again."

With trembling lips the young man stammered forth a few broken words as he stood facing the surprised and abashed girl. It was hard to understand what he said, but that did not really matter. His punishment had been severe, and his captor felt somewhat satisfied.

"Now, clear out," he ordered, "and be thankful all the rest of your days that you have escaped so easily."

Scarcely had he finished speaking ere a large police officer forced his way through the crowd. He grasped the situation in an instant, and when he saw the man standing near the culprit, a light of recognition came into his eyes.

"Shall I take him, sir?" he asked, at the same time giving the salute.

"No, Sergeant, I think we had better let him go this time," was the reply. "He has been taught a lesson already which he is not likely to forget."

When the crowd saw that there was to be no more excitement, it quickly dispersed, and the stream of humanity surged along the street as before. The police-

man, too, moved away, leaving the girl and her protector standing near each other.

"You have had a hard time to-night," the man remarked. "I am so sorry those rascals gave you such trouble."

"Oh, it was so kind of you to come to our assistance," the girl replied. "My father is very tired, and the little money we made is all gone."

"May I have your violin for a while, sir?" the stranger asked turning to the violinist, at the same time taking the instrument gently from the trembling hands. "You must be very tired."

During the whole of the scene the old man had been trying to comprehend the meaning of the commotion. His daughter was too greatly excited to explain anything. But when he heard the stranger speak to him he at once complied with his request and allowed him to take his beloved instrument. The girl slipped her hand in his and squeezed it hard, and then stood watching her kind protector.

The latter lifted the violin quickly to his shoulder, faced the crowded street, and drew the bow across the strings. There was a great difference now in the playing, and many people paused to listen. There was something which appealed to them in the music which was pouring forth. It stirred their nobler feelings and aroused in them the spirit of sympathy for the poor and unfortunate. They comprehended the purpose of the musician when they saw the feeble old man and the girl standing nearby. The hearts of many were strangely stirred, and they vied with one another in dropping money into the dusty hat which the girl was again holding forth. Silver mingled with bills, and the

girl's face grew bright and her heart happy the heavier the hat became. It seemed to her like a wonderful dream, and that the player was a fairy who had come to her assistance. She wanted to watch him and listen to the music he was making, but she had little time for that, as she had to pay attention to the money she was collecting.

Suddenly the music stopped and when the girl turned her head she saw the stranger handing the violin to her father. She wanted to speak to him, to thank him for his kindness, but before she could act he had disappeared among the crowd.

As the music ceased, so did the giving, and the unheeding crowd once more surged on its way. But the girl did not care, as she had all the money she could manage.

"Let us go now, father," she said. "We have done well to-night, and I am so anxious to know how much we have."

"Yes, Nan, let us be off at once," the old man wearily replied. "I am greatly confused and do not fully understand all that has taken place. You must thank the stranger for his kindness, though. His music was wonderful."

"But he has gone, father. He vanished among the crowd, and I am afraid that I shall never see him again. Oh, he was splendid! How I wish you could have seen him."

"But I heard him speak, Nan, and listened to his playing, so that was something."

They were standing close to each other, talking as simply as if they were completely alone. In her great innocence, Nan did not realise that greedy eyes were

watching the bulging hat she was still holding before her, and that itching hands were but waiting an opportunity to snatch away the treasure.

They had turned to leave the place, when a policeman suddenly appeared before them.

"I have been instructed to accompany you home," he briefly informed them.

Into the girl's eyes came a look of fear which the policeman was not slow to notice.

"Don't be afraid, Miss," he remarked. "It is for your welfare that I am here. It is not safe for you to go alone through the streets with all that money. There are people watching you already to snatch it away from you."

"Are there?" and the girl looked fearfully around. "I don't see them."

"No, I know you don't. But they are watching you, nevertheless, so let us go at once."

"Who sent you here to help us?" the girl enquired, as they moved along by the side of the policeman. "Was it that kind man who played so nicely?"

"I received orders to come," was the reply. "That is all I can tell you. But I think you had better let me carry that money," he added, "perhaps it will be safer with me."

The girl was only too glad to comply with his request, for she was beginning to get quite nervous as they moved along through the crowds. She imagined now that many people were following them in order to steal their treasure.

It was quite a distance they had to travel, and very glad was the old man when at length they stopped before the door of a house on a narrow street.

"You live here?" the policeman asked, as he handed the hat with the money to the girl.

"Oh, no," was the reply. "We are only staying here for the night. We live in the country. This is a boarding place, and we have been here before. We are very grateful to you for your kindness, sir, and we shall never forget you."

"It's all in the night's work," the policeman replied. "But be careful of that money. Keep a good watch over it."

"Indeed I shall," and the girl hugged it close to her breast. "It means so much to us."

The policeman moved away, and then stopped and watched the house for a few minutes after the old man and the girl had entered the building.

"Good Lord! what innocents," he muttered to himself. "They wouldn't have got half a block with that money if I hadn't been along. I wonder how they'll make out getting away. Live in the country, the girl said. They should stay there, then. The city's certainly no place for such as them."

CHAPTER II

WHERE FLOWS THE TIDE

AFTER Douglas Stanton had handed back the violin to the blind musician, he stood a little distance off and watched to see what would happen. He felt quite interested in the old man and the girl, and longed to know something about them. Why were they thus appealing to the crowds for money? The man did not seem like the ordinary street musician, as there was something dignified and refined in his manner. The girl was unusually timid. He could not forget the big blue eyes which had turned to him in gratitude for his assistance, and he had noticed how clean and neat was her simple dress.

"Queer couple that, sir; mere babies."

The man turned suddenly and saw the police sergeant standing by his side.

"Do you know who they are?" Douglas enquired.

"No; never saw them before. But they're such kids that I feel sorry for them, and so ordered Hawkins to see that they got safe home."

"It was good of you, Sergeant, to do that. But, say, I didn't know you were on this beat. When did you leave the water-front?"

"Last night, sir. Flemming's down there now. You know him, I think; he was with me for a while last spring when things were lively there."

"Yes, I remember quite well. He helped us in that Fenston row."

"He's the one, and a good man, too. But I did like that beat, as I was on it so long. It is too tame up here, and you know I'm fond of a bit of excitement now and then."

"You got it down there all right, didn't you, especially when the docks were full?"

"You bet," and the sergeant smacked his lips as past scenes came to his mind. "But it's quiet at the docks now. I haven't seen you there for the last few days, sir."

"I know you haven't, and you won't see me there again for some time. I'm going down to-night to have one more look at the old place."

"Why, not going away!" the sergeant exclaimed in surprise.

"That's about it."

"My, my! What in the world shall we do without you! There'll be no one to take an interest in things down there now."

"Oh, there'll be plenty, I guess."

"You're the first one who ever did, and I'm damned sure those high-brows won't follow your lead. Not a bit of it! They're too much taken up with their pink teas, and such things, and wouldn't think of soiling their nice hands with dock trash."

The sergeant was on his favourite subject now, and his temper was rising. Douglas had heard his opinions before, and was not anxious to listen to them again.

"I must be off now, Sergeant. I shall always remember your kindness."

"But you'll be sure to give us a call, sir? The missus will feel all cut up if you don't."

"Yes, I'll be around as soon as I can. So, good-night."

The worthy sergeant stood and watched him as he moved away.

"Too bad," he muttered. "We can't afford to lose the likes of him. Wonder where in the world he's going. I've always said we couldn't keep him forever, and I guess I was right. It must be a mighty big thing that would take him away from the docks. He should be a chief of police instead of being nothing but a go-cart."

While the sergeant was thus musing, Douglas moved as rapidly as possible along the crowded streets. He wished to get away from the commotion of the throngs that he might consider the thoughts that were uppermost in his mind. Keeping steadily on, he at length reached the street running along the front of the harbour. It was a narrow street, dimly lighted, with huge warehouses on both sides. There was little traffic now, as this was a winter port, and the big ocean liners did not come here during the summer months. It was not a desirable locality, especially at night, and most people shunned the place. The few Douglas met were either hurrying to get away as soon as possible or slinking slowly along, preferring this gloomy abode to the brightly-lighted parts of the city.

The street at length became wider where the docks ran out into the harbour. At several of these small steamers were lying, and a number of sailing craft. Here men were busy loading and unloading the vessels. Douglas did not stop to watch them, as at other times, but

kept steadily on until he reached the last dock which was entirely deserted. One electric light shed its beams out over the water, which was kept burning as a guide to incoming boats. Down this dock he walked, and when he came close to the water he stood for a while and looked out over the harbour. It was an inspiring sight to see the lights gleaming on the opposite shore, and from the passing tugs and other vessels.

Here a large warehouse ran along one side of the dock almost to the water's edge. Just around the nearest corner was a steamer's broken shaft, and noticing this, Douglas sat down upon it to rest. It was almost high tide, and the water lapped lazily against the dock. There was a restful quietness here, and Douglas enjoyed the respite from the busy crowds. Below the dock several small tugs were moored, and the sound of voices came to him occasionally from that direction. He thought of the last time he had visited this place, and how the dock then was the scene of such bustling commotion, for a big ocean liner was all ready to leave. She had gone and had left not a visible trace behind. So it would be with him, he mused. Soon he himself would be away, and the life of the city would go on the same and none would remember him. His thoughts drifted to the principal ones who were responsible for his going, and his face hardened, while his hands clenched. He knew what they would say when they heard of it. There would be a slight lifting of the eyebrows, no more than good breeding would allow. It would be mentioned at afternoon teas, and at card-tables. He could imagine what some of them would say. "Poor fellow, his head was somewhat turned with that dock work. He will learn wisdom as he gets older." Yes, such remarks

as these would be made, and then he would be entirely forgotten.

He remained musing in this fashion for some time, lost to the world around him. He was going away—he knew not whither, defeated for a while but not beaten. He had the future before him, and he would make good. If he could not do it here, he would in some other place.

The sound of voices at last aroused him. It came from his left, and he peered around the corner of the warehouse. For a few seconds he could see no one, but he knew there were people not far off who were talking in a most earnest manner. Presently, out of the darkness stepped a man and a woman, and passed directly under the electric lamp. He saw their faces distinctly, especially the woman's, which was strained and haggard, as she listened to her companion. As they came nearer and stood close to the edge of the dock, it was possible for Douglas to overhear parts of the conversation. He could not see their faces now, though he could observe their forms, and he knew that the woman was standing near the water, and it was quite evident that she was weeping.

"But you promised me, Ben; you really did," she was saying.

"I know I did, Jean, but we must wait a while," was the reply.

"But we cannot wait," the woman urged. "You know how serious it is if we delay much longer. All will know, and I shall be disgraced."

"Tut, tut," and the man stamped angrily upon the floor of the dock. "Don't talk so foolishly. A few weeks won't make any difference."

"How long do you think?" the woman asked.

"Oh, five or six, I should imagine."

"No, I tell you that will be too late. It must not be longer than two. Promise me that it will not be more than that."

"Well, I promise," the man slowly assented.

"Swear to it, then," the woman demanded. "Place your left hand upon your heart, and hold your right hand up to heaven, and swear by Him who is watching and listening that you will be true to your word."

A coarse, brutal laugh came from the man's lips.

"Won't you believe me?" he demanded.

"Not unless you swear."

"Well, I won't, so that's the end of it."

At these words the woman gave a low moan, and what she said Douglas could not hear. Whatever it was it made the man angry and he again stamped his foot.

"What do I care?" he growled. "You can go to the snivelling old idiot and tell him all you want to."

"Oh, Ben!" and the woman laid a hand upon his arm, "how can you say such things?"

With a curse he flung her hand away, and then in a twinkling he gave her a push, and before she could recover herself she had gone backwards over the edge of the dock. With a frightened cry she disappeared, and the man, instead of trying to rescue her, leaped aside and vanished into the darkness.

All this happened so quickly that Douglas hardly realised what had taken place before it was all over. His first impulse was to spring after the man who had committed the cowardly deed. But the thought of the woman down there in the water deterred him and caused him to hasten at once to her assistance. Anxiously he peered over the edge, and at length saw a hand thrust

above the surface. It took him but an instant to tear off his coat and hurl himself into the water below. A few powerful strokes brought him close to the woman, and he was enabled to reach out and clutch her with a firm grip ere she again disappeared. Fortunate it was for him that he was a strong swimmer, and he was thus able to hold the woman's head above water while he slowly worked his way toward the lower side of the dock, where he hoped to find a landing place. He had not proceeded far, however, ere a rowboat shot suddenly out from the shore, and a deep voice hailed him.

"Hold on a minute!" was the order. Soon the boat was near, and both Douglas and the woman were hauled aboard.

"What have ye got there? A woman?" the boatman asked.

"Yes," was the brief response.

"Thought so," the rescuer laconically remarked. "Screamed when she went over, didn't she?"

"Yes."

"I thought so. They all do that. It was her I heard all right."

"What, is such a case as this common?" Douglas asked in surprise.

"Well, I couldn't say it is common, but forty odd years in and around this harbour afford one some queer sights. But here we are."

The boatman swung his craft around and drew it up by the side of a tugboat which was lying at its wharf. It did not take long to lift the woman from the rowboat up to the deck above.

"Have you a light?" Douglas enquired. "I want to see whether this woman is dead or alive."

"Oh, she's alive all right," was the reply. "Ye can't knock the likes of her out with a little dip like that. But I'll get the light, if ye want it."

It did not take the old man long to bring a lantern, and when the light fell upon the woman's face she moved her head and gave a slight moan.

"She's all right," the boatman remarked. "The best thing to do is to phone fer the ambulance. The hospital's the place fer her. She'll have a decent place fer the night, anyway, and they'll fix her up there. There's a phone in the drug-store just around the corner."

Douglas realised that this was the best course to pursue and, wet though he was, he sprang ashore and hurried up the street. It took him only a few minutes to reach the drug-store, where he sent in a hurry call for the ambulance. He paid no attention to the curious looks cast upon his drenched figure by several people who were standing near. In fact, he had forgotten how wet he was, so interested was he in obtaining aid for the unfortunate woman as speedily as possible.

Upon his return to the tug, he found the old man keeping guard.

"How is she now?" he asked.

"Ye can see fer yourself," and the boatman swung around his lantern as he spoke.

Douglas now had more time to observe the face of the woman before him. Her head, resting on an old coat, turned slightly to one side, was partly covered by a wealth of jet-black hair, forming a striking contrast to the face which was so very white. It was a face of considerable beauty, though lines of care were plainly visible. She seemed but a girl lying there, and as Doug-

las looked at her an intense anger smote his soul, and he longed to lay his hands upon the wretch who had tried to destroy her.

"Why are such brutes allowed their freedom?" he asked turning toward the boatman.

"Hey, what is that you say?" was the reply.

"I wonder why human brutes are permitted to have their freedom, and injure a woman such as that?"

"You saw the deed, then?"

"Yes, I happened to be on the dock over there, when she was pushed into the water by her companion. He disappeared before I could get my hands on him."

"Oh, that is always the way. The women are the ones who suffer while the men get scot-free. But, say, here is the car now."

It did not take long to transfer the woman from the tug to the ambulance, and when the car had departed, Douglas turned to the boatman.

"I wish to thank you for what you have done to-night, sir. But for your timely assistance I fear I should have had a hard time getting ashore."

"Oh, never mind your thanks," was the reply. "I'm mighty glad that I was nearby to give a hand. It does one good sometimes to help a poor creature in distress. But you had better hustle and change your wet clothes or the ambulance will have to come fer you next."

"You're right, I do feel chilly, so good-night."

"Good-night," was the reply, "and when ye want any help with that scoundrel, just call upon Cap' Dodges, of the 'Nancy Staines.'"

CHAPTER III

CONSCIENCE MONEY

THE rector of St. Margaret's was visibly annoyed as he hung up the telephone receiver. "Confound that fellow," he muttered, "where can he be? I have phoned to him six times and can get no answer. I shall not call him again. I'm really glad he's going for he gets on my nerves with all his odd notions." Turning to his desk, he continued his work upon his sermon for next Sunday morning.

It was a large, comfortable study, and the walls were well lined with books. Dr. Rannage was noted far and wide as a deep student, as well as a great preacher. The people of St. Margaret's were proud of their rector's ability, and listened, so they often told him, with delight to his intellectual sermons. He was particularly at home when dealing with the Major and Minor Prophets or on the Textual Criticism of the Bible. Regular Pastoral Visitation he disliked, and left most of such work to his curate, though occasionally he called upon the most influential members of his flock. He was a special favourite in social circles, and being a brilliant after-dinner speaker he was much in demand to grace numerous festive gatherings. Little wonder, then, that Dr. Rannage had no time for anything else but the preparation of his Sunday sermons, of which work he was very fond.

To-night, however, he could not concentrate his thoughts upon his subject. His mind would wander, and several times he found himself thinking of the dinner he had that evening with his Bishop. He knew that the position of Archdeacon was vacant, and he was fondly hoping that he would be favoured with the appointment. It would be another step, so he mused, up the ecclesiastical ladder leading to the Episcopate.

He had forgotten all about his sermon and was thinking deeply of the prospects of his advancement, when his curate, Douglas Stanton, entered the room unannounced.

"You are over half an hour late, Stanton," Dr. Rannage chided, as he motioned his visitor to a chair. "What is the meaning of this?"

"I am very sorry," Douglas replied, as he took the proffered chair. "I intended to be here on time, but was unavoidably detained."

"I dined with the Bishop to-night," and Dr. Rannage toyed with a small paper-weight as he spoke, "and was forced to leave in the midst of a most important discussion in order to keep my appointment with you."

"What were you discussing?" Douglas enquired.

"We were considering the best methods of dealing with the submerged population of our city; that is, those unfortunate beings who inhabit the slums and the waterfront."

"Did you arrive at any definite conclusion?"

"We had not time; for, as I have just mentioned, I was forced to come away to meet you."

"And while you were discussing methods of helping the unfortunate, I was rescuing one from the water down at Long Wharf."

Douglas spoke slowly, and he watched to see the effect of his words. But Dr. Rannage did not seem to notice the implied sarcasm, nor the sharp contrast between theory and practice.

"So that is what you were doing, eh?" the latter questioned. "You seem to enjoy being down there."

"I enjoy helping the unfortunate, and because I am not allowed to continue the work, I have sent in my resignation."

"But you must remember that you have a duty to the parish as a whole, and not to one portion of it only."

"Haven't I tried to do my duty? I have visited in season and out of season, and worked like a dog for the two years I have been with you."

"But I have received complaints that you are unsociable, and that you refuse all invitations to, ah, friendly gatherings and such like affairs."

"You mean card-parties and afternoon teas, I suppose," Douglas sharply replied. "If so, I plead guilty. Haven't I taken a keen interest in the Boy Scouts, the Young Men's Club, the Sunday School, and dear knows what? Any spare time I had I spent at the water-front in an effort to follow my Master's example of putting my religion into practice. How dare I waste my time sipping tea at this house and that, and talking nice little nothings to the butterflies who gather there, when there is so much to be done, and precious souls to be helped and saved?"

"But the butterflies, of whom you speak so contemptuously, need to be helped as well."

"No one knows that better than I do," Douglas bitterly assented. "But until they are willing to throw aside their vain pretensions of being the salt of the

earth and better than others, I am afraid little can be done. They dislike me because I speak my mind too freely, and refuse to waste my time at their senseless gatherings. They desire some one who will flatter their vanity and condone their idleness."

"You are making serious charges, young man," Dr. Rannage severely replied. His curate's words had hit him hard, and he winced, for he knew how true they were. "If that is the feeling you entertain for innocent amusements, it is just as well you should sever your connection with this parish. When do you expect to leave?"

"At once."

"And where do you intend to go?"

"I have not the slightest idea. The future to me is a complete blank. Something will turn up, I suppose. If not, I have two hands and a strong body."

"Look here, Stanton," and Dr. Rannage swung suddenly around on his swivel chair, "you must not get downhearted."

"I am not," was the reply.

"Well, perhaps you are not, but I do not like the idea of your going from me with nothing in view. Do you know the parish of Rixton?"

"Yes, I have heard of it, though I know very little about it."

"It seems that it has been vacant for some time, and it is most difficult to get any one to go there. By the way, I met Mr. Simon Stubbles at dinner to-night. He is the leading man at Rixton, and the Bishop and I were much impressed with him. He is very wealthy, so I understand; has a large sawmill, and carries on extensive lumbering operations. He is greatly concerned

about the spiritual welfare of Rixton, and is most anxious that a suitable clergyman should be sent there. He is quite willing to contribute liberally if the right man is found."

"Why did the last one leave?" Douglas asked.

"He was not big enough for the work, so I learned from the brief conversation I had with Mr. Stubbles. It is a most difficult parish, composed principally of millmen, woodsmen, and a few farmers. It seems that the last clergyman used no tact at all in dealing with them, and thus antagonised everybody, Mr. Stubbles included."

"So you think that I would suit, do you?" and Douglas looked quizzically at Dr. Rannage.

"I believe you are just the man for the place."

"What makes you think so?"

"Because you know the ways of such people. You were born in the country, were you not?"

"Why not let young Harmon have a try there? He is one of your boys, and has just been ordained. Would it not be well for him to win his spurs in a parish such as Rixton?"

"Oh, but he is a banker's son, you know, and we could not think of sending him there."

"So I supposed," was the bitter reply, "though I never for a moment imagined that you would so candidly acknowledge it."

"Acknowledge what?" Dr. Rannage queried.

"That because Harmon is a banker's son he would not be sent to an out-of-the-way country parish. His father is influential and can influence those in authority, so he is booked for an important charge in Silverton, so I

understand. I am merely the son of a poor, honest farmer, and so any old place will do for me."

"See here, young man, you have no right to talk that way," Dr. Rannage retorted. "If you continue, I shall be compelled to report you to the Bishop."

"Report all you like, but you both know it's true, and you cannot deny it. Harmon barely scraped through college, but he is considered a gentleman's son, and understands the ways of polite society. Mark my words, his career will be followed with great interest, and everything he does will be noted and favourably commented upon. It will not be long before he will be an Archdeacon, or a Dean, and finally a Bishop."

"Are you jealous of Harmon?" Dr. Rannage asked. "That is the only conclusion I can draw from your sarcastic remarks."

"Jealousy has nothing to do with it," was the quick reply. "It is merely justice that I demand, a right for every man to be judged according to what he is and does, irrespective of what his father is, or any influence he may exert. The Church is the last place where such injustice should be allowed. But, there, what is the use of my talking to you or any one else, when you attribute my feeling to jealousy?"

Douglas had risen, and stood with his hat in his hand ready to depart.

"So you don't feel inclined to try Rixton, then?" Dr. Rannage asked. He was quite amused at his curate's words, and considered them merely the outburst of a hot-headed youth. Douglas noted this, and with a great effort controlled himself.

"I shall consider the matter very carefully," was his reply. "If I decide to go, I shall report to the Bishop."

"Wait a minute," Dr. Rannage ordered as Douglas was about to leave the room. "There is something I almost overlooked. You received your cheque for last month, I suppose?"

"Yes, the treasurer gave it to me several days ago."

"There was a meeting of the vestry last night, and I mentioned that you had sent in your resignation," Dr. Rannage explained.

"And I suppose all the members were delighted with the news."

"Why should they? They are all business men, and look well after the temporalities of St. Margaret's. They paid tribute to your earnest work, and as a token of appreciation they asked me to give you this," and Dr. Rannage handed the young man a cheque. "I think this will prove to you better than many words how generous the members of the vestry really are."

Douglas took the cheque in his hand and studied it very carefully. In fact, he looked at it so long without saying anything that Dr. Rannage was surprised.

"Are you not satisfied with it?" he curtly asked, noting the flush which was slowly stealing over Douglas' face. "I took it upon myself to ask something for you, thinking that it would give you considerable pleasure."

"I am not considering the amount of the cheque," Douglas replied, "but something far more important. St. Margaret's is a rich church, is it not?"

"Yes, I suppose so," was the reluctant assent.

"The richest in the city?"

"Yes. But what has that to do with that cheque?" Dr. Rannage angrily retorted.

"It is heavily endowed, and there was a big surplus

last Easter, according to the Year Book," Douglas continued, unheeding his rector's annoyance.

"We have good business men on the vestry," Dr. Rannage proudly explained, "and that is the main reason why we are in such excellent financial condition. They have been most careful to invest all moneys where they bring in big returns."

"What did they give me this for, then?" Douglas asked as he held forth the cheque. "It must have wrung their souls to part with one hundred dollars for nothing."

"Oh, that was given merely out of appreciation for your good work in the parish."

"Since when have they become appreciative?"

"Why, haven't they been always so?"

"If they were, they never showed any signs of it. It seemed to me just the opposite, especially when I asked them for a few hundred dollars last fall to rent a building as a shelter for the unfortunate on the water-front. They told me pretty plainly what they thought of my 'new-fangled notion,' as they called it."

"They were merely cautious, that was all," Dr. Rannage defended. "As I told you, they are all good business men, and they wished to be sure that the investment would, ah——"

"Pay," Douglas assisted, as his rector hesitated. "Yes, that was just it. They thought it wouldn't pay in dollars and cents, so they refused to have anything to do with it. The return in lives helped and souls saved did not trouble them in the least. But now, when they know that I am going, perhaps they may have had a twinge of conscience; that is, if they have any, and

what they have given me is nothing more than conscience money."

These words brought Dr. Rannage suddenly to his feet. He had always prided himself upon his self-control, but such a charge made by any man, especially a mere curate, was more than he could endure.

"What do you mean by talking that way?" he demanded. "Ever since you entered this room you have been as ugly as——"

"The devil," Douglas assisted as Dr. Rannage paused. "You might as well say it as think it. If telling the truth, and telling it plainly is being ugly, then I plead guilty. I question if what I have said will be of any benefit to you, but it has done a great deal of good to me. It has somewhat relieved my mind, and that is worth something."

"You will relieve my mind, if you will go," Dr. Rannage retorted. "It is absolutely ridiculous that I should be talked to in this manner, especially after what I have done for you."

"Oh, you mean this?" and Douglas glanced at the cheque. "Well, then, I wish to show you and the members of the vestry how I value such, ahem, appreciation. Look!"

Holding the cheque up with both hands, he deliberately tore it into bits, and then, crossing the room, he threw the pieces into the fireplace.

"There, I feel better now," he quietly remarked. "So, good-night."

Before Dr. Rannage could recover from his astonishment, the study door opened and closed, and Douglas Stanton was gone.

CHAPTER IV

SECRET PLANS

"HELLO! what's the rush?"

Douglas Stanton stopped short, and a smile overspread his face as he turned it upon the beaming countenance of the man standing before him.

"Oh, it's you, Garton, is it? I didn't see you."

"You certainly didn't. Why, you were cutting a two-forty clip."

"I'm late for tea," Douglas explained.

"So am I," Garton returned. "Just before I left the office, I was called down to the drill-shed to make a presentation to one of our men who is about to get married. Kit will be furious with me for staying so long. Women don't like to be kept waiting, you know. Kit doesn't, anyway. She says the kids will make it hot for me when I get home."

"You're a lucky brute, Garton, to have a home to go to, and a wife and such kids as yours."

"I certainly am. But, say, Stanton, come and have dinner with us."

"How can I? Your wife won't be expecting me, and I shall be intruding."

"Look here, old man," and Garton laid his hand affectionately upon his companion's shoulder, "don't you know that you are always welcome at our house? Kit

were comfortably ensconced in big chairs in the library, enjoying a quiet smoke, that Douglas referred to the subject which had been abruptly dropped.

"Do you know much about Rixton?" he asked.

"Quite a bit, from hearsay. It's a queer community, so I understand, and the Church has had a mighty hard struggle there."

"What's wrong with it, anyway?"

"I can't exactly say. But no clergyman has been able to hold his own there for years. It may have been their fault, and perhaps if the right man goes to the parish, things might be all right. I wish to goodness you were going anywhere else than to Rixton. I wonder what the Bishop is thinking about to send you to that place."

"Merely because he thinks that I know the ways of such people, as I was brought up in the country."

"We want you here in the city, though," and Garton savagely blew a great cloud of smoke across the room.

"But Dr. Rannage and the majority of the people of St. Margaret's don't want me. They are delighted to think that I am going."

"Yes, so I understand, confound their skins! They want some little snipper-snapper who can dance attendance upon all the pink-teas that are held, and shine in social circles."

"I could not suit them," Douglas slowly explained, "because the spirit of adventure runs in my veins. I would like to be a prospector or an explorer, and launch out into the unknown. As soon as I entered the Ministry, I looked around for some untouched field in which to enter. The complex life along the water-front appealed to me more than the conventional work in St.

Margaret's. There are great opportunities there, especially during the winter season. But, alas! my plans have been overturned, and I must give it all up. I have often thought of the mission field, and when an opening occurs I hope to go. At present the parish of Rixton is without a clergyman, and most likely it will remain so for some time unless I go. It is a very difficult parish, so I understand, and it accordingly appeals to me. I am quite curious to know just what is the trouble, and in what way it is different from other country districts. Have you any idea?"

"It is somewhat of a puzzle to me," Garton replied. "It really should be an ideal parish, for nearly all of the people belong to our Church. Mr. Stubbles himself is a member, and senior warden, so I believe."

"You know him, then?"

"Yes, in a way. I have had some business dealings with him, and incidentally I have talked with him about Church affairs at Rixton. He has always seemed greatly interested."

"And he laid the blame, I suppose, upon the clergymen?"

"Invariably. He said they did not understand country people, and could not adapt themselves to their ways, but held severely aloof."

"There must be some other cause," Douglas mused, "and I must find out what it is."

"When do you expect to go?" Garton enquired.

"To-morrow."

"What! so soon? Why not take a holiday? You certainly need it, if any one does."

"I have asked for two months. I told the Bishop this

afternoon that only on that understanding would I take charge of Rixton."

"But you have just told me that you are going there to-morrow!" Garton exclaimed.

Douglas laughed.

"Look here, old man, I have a plan, and I want to tell it to you, if you will promise that you will not speak of it to any one except your wife. I know she will keep the secret."

"And I guess I can, too," Garton assented. "I keep a good many for my clients, and one more will not overburden me."

"I am going to spend my vacation in Rixton," Douglas explained. "What do you think of that?"

"What do you mean?" Garton asked in surprise.

"Simply that I am going there as an ordinary farm-hand and work for my living for two months."

"Good heavens!" Garton was so astonished at this revelation that he knocked the ashes from his cigar over his clothes. "Are you going crazy, Stanton? What will the Bishop and the people of Rixton think of such a thing?"

"They are not to know anything about it until it is all over. You and Mrs. Garton will be the only ones who will be aware of this freak of mine, so if I get killed, you might give me a decent burial."

"Suppose in case of your death it should be considered wilful suicide, what then?" Garton asked, while an amused twinkle shone in his eyes. "We won't be able to get any one to read the Burial Service over you."

"Oh, I don't believe it will be as bad as that. The people won't know that I am a clergyman, and they will not think it worth while to bother a farm-hand. I shall

be just plain John Handyman to them, and nothing more."

"What put such a notion into your head, anyhow?" Garton enquired.

"I wish to learn what is wrong with the parish of Rixton," was the reply. "I want to get down to bed-rock, so to speak, and find out just what is the trouble."

"But how will your going as a farm-hand help you?"

"I shall have a better chance to see things in their true light. If I go as a clergyman, people will naturally be somewhat suspicious of me, and will say things behind my back which they will not say to my face. But John Handyman will be of little account in their estimation, and they will express their views in his presence freely and openly."

"Does it not seem like taking a mean advantage of them?" Garton queried.

"I can't see it that way. I wish to diagnose that parish and find out what is the trouble. There is a serious disease of some kind there, and unless I know what it is before taking charge I may make all kinds of mistakes, and thus render the work much more difficult. If, in this way, I can accomplish my object and do good to the people of Rixton, I cannot see how I shall be taking a mean advantage of them. If the fault has been with the clergymen who have been there, I want to know it; but if the people are to blame, I want to know that as well."

"I see you believe in understanding the people among whom you work," Garton remarked.

"Certainly. It seems to me that too many of our clergy do not understand their parishioners, especially so in country districts. It was not always so, but

changes have taken place in recent years. How well I remember my old rector, the one whose life I so revere, and principally through whose influence my mind was first turned toward the Ministry. He was a saint, if ever there was one, and he looked well after his flock. He knew his people intimately, not merely officially, but in a sympathetic and loving way. He knew them all by name, even to the smallest child. Their concerns were his, and he entered into their joys and sorrows as one of them, and not as a mere outsider. Why, it was wonderful how much he knew about farming, stock-raising, and such like. He could talk as intelligently to the men about their farms as he could to the women about their children. He was one of them; he loved them and they knew it."

Douglas' eyes shone as he thus bore testimony to the worth of his old rector, and when he suddenly ceased he sat gazing straight before him as if he beheld a vision.

"Is he living yet?" Garton asked.

"No, he died years ago, when I was about seventeen."

"He must have been a remarkable man."

"He certainly was, and his was the model parish in the whole diocese."

"Is it the same now?"

An angry light suddenly leaped into Douglas' eyes, as he turned them upon his companion's face.

"No, it is not the same," he slowly replied. "The parish has gone to pieces, and the changes which have taken place there make my heart ache."

"Why, what has been the cause?" Garton enquired.

"It is due to the men who were sent there after the death of my old rector. The first man who went had no patience with the people in their loyalty to his pred-

ecessor, and he could not bear to hear them tell of the work which had been done in the past. He became jealous, said sharp things, and turned the people against him. The next man took no interest in the things which concern an agricultural people. He openly said that he hated farming, and that he was only staying in the parish until he could get a better one. He moved on after he had driven a number of members from the Church. The third was not satisfied with the services, so he introduced many things which were distasteful to the people, especially the older members. He is there yet, but there is a sad division in the parish, and he has only a very small following. Those three men could not understand the people among whom they worked. I do not want to make the same mistake at Rixton, and so I am going to spy out the land."

"Oh, you'll make out all right," Garton replied, as he laid the butt of his cigar carefully on the ash-tray. "You'll have no trouble. Get on the good side of Stubbles, and he'll see you through. You can't afford to lose the support of such a man as that, who has so great an influence in Rixton. Anyway, if you need help, bank on me. I am always at your service. I'll bring my whole battalion to your assistance. Just send for Col. Garton of the 65th, and he'll be there with his men in no time. But, say, there's Kit at the piano; let's go and have one more good sing together, and forget all about disagreeable Church matters for the present."

CHAPTER V

PUT TO THE TEST

THERE was a special reason why Douglas Stanton walked slowly along the road leading from the railway station through the parish of Rixton. It was a warm, beautiful evening, and the magnificent scenery so appealed to him that he had not the heart to hurry. How good it was to be away from the noise and dust of the city! Here he could breathe the pure, fresh air, listen to the music of the birds, and rest his eyes upon meadows, flowers and trees. He felt at home, and the spirit of childhood days possessed him. He longed to wade in every brook he saw, and roll in the grass by the side of the road.

He had walked about five miles and was somewhat tired, as he was carrying a large bag over his shoulder, and his precious violin case under his arm. He was no longer dressed in his clerical garb, but was plain John Handyman in rough work-a-day clothes. He enquired the way from several people he met, and these had looked with curiosity upon the bag and box he was carrying.

"Huntin' for work, eh?" the last man he had accosted asked. "Well, Jake Jukes wants a man in the worst way. Heard him say so last night. He lives about half a mile further on. Ye can't mistake the place, for it's just across the road from the rectory."

"How will I know the rectory when I come to it?" Douglas enquired.

"Oh, ye can't mistake it very well. It is a big house with shutters on the windows, and tall grass all around. It's been closed up for about a year now."

This was just the information Douglas needed, and thanking the man, he moved on his way. Presently, the road dipped into a wooded valley, and part way down the hill, Douglas espied a large barrel overflowing with clear, sparkling water. Stopping, he opened his bag and drew forth a small tin cup. This he filled with water, and then withdrew a short distance among the trees and sat down upon the mossy ground. Mrs. Garton had thoughtfully provided him with a generous lunch, and this he now opened and spread out before him. He was hungry, so the sandwiches and cold meat seemed the best he had ever tasted. There was a piece of pie, as well as cake, for dessert, and what more could a king desire? he asked himself. How delightful it was to lie there and rest in such a quiet place. He was free to come and go as he wished, and not shackled by any rules of conventional life. The whole country was his to wander at will. Why should he not do it? He had only himself to care for, and his strong arms could provide the simple necessities of daily life. Why spend his time in the service of others, when his efforts were either misunderstood or not appreciated? He was tired of being dictated to, and told what to do. He was just as able to look after his own affairs as the Bishop and Dr. Rannage. They did not care a snap for him, neither did the Church, for that matter. He was but a fly on one of the wheels of the great ecclesiastical machine, and counted for nothing.

Such thoughts appealed to Douglas more than ever before, and he meditated upon them as he once more continued on his way. He had been trained to look with suspicion upon people who held such views, but now he realised how attractive they were, and worthy of more careful consideration. Life, after all, was not summed up in the books he had studied, nor in the knowledge he had acquired while at college. No, there was the great pulsing world all around him, and why should he go through it fettered in soul, mind and body?

Thinking thus, he came to the rectory. The gate leading into the yard was closed. This he pushed open, entered, and walked around the house. Signs of neglect and decay were most apparent. The building had not been painted for years, and the shingles on the roof were in a bad condition. Grass and weeds ran riot right up to the very windows. He tried both the front and back doors but they were fastened.

Amidst this scene of desolation, Douglas stood and looked out over the land connected with the rectory. There were several acres, sloping gently to the river about two hundred yards away. Trees lined the shore, and his attention was especially attracted to one large elm which towered gracefully above its fellows. Only a small part of the land surrounding the rectory had been cultivated. The rest, which had been used for pasturage, was covered with small bushes. Several apple trees stood back of the house, but these had not been trimmed for years, and the bark and moss were thick upon their trunks. "My, how I would like to get to work upon this place," Douglas thought, as he moved over toward the small orchard. "They seem to be good trees, and when once well scraped and their tops thinned

out, they should bear well. Why, a man with some knowledge of farming could make a comfortable living in a few years on such a place as this."

Near the orchard was a barn, with the two big doors off their hinges, having been injured evidently by the wind. There was nothing in the barn except a pile of old hay lying upon the floor. "That looks good to me," Douglas mused. "I shall have a soft bed to-night, anyway. It is getting dark, and I might as well stay here as anywhere. I wonder what the people of this parish would say if they knew that their future clergyman is occupying the rectory barn. He might have a worse place, though, and perhaps he may before he is through."

Douglas was tired and slept soundly. The night was warm, and his coat was all the covering he needed. It seemed to him that he had been sleeping but a short time when he was awakened by a strange and yet familiar noise. Opening his eyes, he could not for a moment imagine where he was. Before him, and just outside the door, a herd of cattle was trooping past. They were much startled to see a man lying in the barn, and several of them had given vent to coarse bellows as they stood staring in upon him. Presently he heard a man's voice shouting to the cattle to "git along out of that. What's the matter with ye, anyway?" Then a stick was hurled at them, which caused them to scamper away. Soon the man appeared, and when he saw what had caused the commotion among the cattle, he, too, stood and stared in amazement for a few seconds. Then he took several steps forward, and held up the stout stick he was carrying in his hand.

"Hi, what are ye doin' there?" he demanded.

"Haven't you eyes to see for yourself?" Douglas asked in reply.

"But don't ye know that this is private property?"

"That's just the reason I'm here. It's so very private that it suits me fine."

"You have no business sleepin' in this barn."

"I'm not sleeping. I am as wide awake as you are. Do you own this place?"

"No, but I have charge of it. It's Church property, and as I live jist across the road I have been asked to keep an eye over it an' put all intruders off."

Douglas liked the appearance of this fellow, notwithstanding his pugnacious manner. He had an honest face, and bright blue eyes, in whose depths lurked a merry twinkle. He took it for granted that this was Jake Jukes who wanted a farm hand.

"Come and put me off, then," Douglas quietly remarked, as he rose slowly to his feet. "I am anxious for a little excitement. It will give me an appetite for my breakfast."

"Where are you goin' to git it?" the farmer asked.

"At your place."

"At my place!"

"Certainly. You are Jake Jukes, are you not? You want a man to help with your haying, and I am going to stay."

"Great punkins! How d'ye know who I am?" and Jake looked his astonishment.

"Oh, never mind that. Do you want me? That is more important."

"Well, I do need help very bad, but I must know what wages ye want before I hire ye. I can't make an offer until I find out what ye kin do."

"I'll work a week with you for board and lodging. That will give you time to try me out, and then you will know what I am worth. I'll bet almost anything, though, that I am just as good a man as you are."

"Ho, ho," Jake laughed. "As good a man as I am! Ye don't know what ye're sayin'. Would ye like to try a back-hold with me? There isn't a man in the whole parish of Rixton who has been able to put me down yit, though many of 'em have tried."

As a lad at school, and also while at college, Douglas had excelled in wrestling, but for several years he had not engaged in the sport, and was not in proper condition. He knew that if it came to the matter of physical endurance he would have little chance against this sturdy farmer. But it was necessary for him to do something of a worthy nature at the outset of his career in this parish.

"So you think you can put me down, do you?" he asked, as he stepped from the barn out upon the grass. "Well, then, here's your opportunity."

Nothing loath, Jake accepted the challenge, and in a trice the two were locked together in a friendly yet desperate encounter. Douglas soon found that Jake was depending mostly upon his great strength of body to win, and that he was acquainted with hardly any of the tricks of the game. He, therefore, watched his opportunity, at the same time being careful not to allow his opponent to make use of his bear-like crushing grip. This was what Jake was striving for, and he was much worried when he found that he could not carry out the plan which had always proved so effective in the past. He became puzzled, and so confused that ere long he allowed himself to be caught off guard, with the result

"But he deserves to be thumped," the latter insisted. "He's Empty in name and empty in head, that's what he is. What business has he to be sleepin' behind this tree?"

"He has as much business to be here as we have," Douglas defended, "and don't you dare to touch him again. Take your hands off him, or you'll go down quicker than you did up by the barn."

The memory of his recent defeat was so fresh in Jake's mind that reluctantly he relinquished his hold upon the youth's arm.

"I'll let ye off this time," he growled, "but don't let me ever catch ye hangin' around this place agin."

"I wasn't doin' nuthin'," the lad protested, speaking for the first time.

"Ye've been up to some mischief," Jake charged.

"No, I haven't."

"What have ye been doin', then?"

"Fishin'; that's what I've been doin', and I came here to git a little sleep."

"Where's yer net?"

"Out there," and the lad pointed with his finger across the water. "Didn't ye know I was fishin'?"

"Naw, never heard of ye workin' before. Ho, ho, that's a good one! To think of Empty Dempster workin'! What's goin' to happen!"

At that instant the blast of a tin horn fell upon their ears, which caused Jake to start and look across the field.

"Great punkins!" he exclaimed. "It's Susie, an' I fergot all about them cows!"

CHAPTER VI

DOWN BY THE RIVER

THE neglected cattle had been having a fine time roving at will wherever their fancy led. They had left the uninviting rectory grounds and were revelling in their master's turnip patch when discovered by Mrs. Jukes. When the men at last arrived and dislodged them from this delectable spot, they scampered across the fields, trampling through the young corn and potato patch until they reached the peas, beets and carrots, where they stopped for another feast. Jake was almost in despair. He shouted frantically, waved his arms, and hurled stones at his wayward herd. It was only with the greatest difficulty that the cattle were at last rounded up in the barn-yard, and the gate closed.

Mrs. Jukes had taken an important part in this affair, and now stood facing her crestfallen husband, with her eyes ablaze with anger. The presence of the stranger did not deter her in the least.

"Where have you been?" she demanded. "Breakfast has been ready for half an hour, and if it hadn't been for me, the cows would have eaten everything up on the place. Were you asleep?"

"I—I was gettin' a man to help with the work," Jake stammered. "He's here now."

"H'm," and Mrs. Jukes tossed her head. "I guess

there wouldn't have been any need for a man to help with the work if the cows had been left much longer. Where did you come from, Empty?" and she turned toward the youth standing near Douglas.

"I was fishin'," the lad replied.

"Had your breakfast yet?"

"Naw."

"Well, come in, then, and have a bite. You've earned it all right this morning. Bring your help in, Jake. I guess there's enough for all."

Mrs. Jukes' anger soon passed, and by the time they reached the house she was in a more pleasant frame of mind. She was a bright, active little body, and Douglas won her friendship at once by the interest he took in her two children, a girl of six and a boy of three. While Mrs. Jukes was busy placing the breakfast upon the table, Douglas had the children on his knees, and was asking them their names and quizzing them about the things in which they were interested. Though very busy, Mrs. Jukes noticed this, and she felt greatly pleased at the attention the stranger paid to her offspring. She noted, as well, his refined face, his gentle manner, and the words he used, for Mrs. Jukes had been a school teacher before she married, and, according to her husband, she had "a great deal of larnin'." She knew enough, at least, to keep Jake in his place, and to make him attend strictly to his work, with the result that their farm was the best cultivated one in the community.

"You sit here, sir," she told Douglas, putting a chair in place. "I'm sorry there isn't more for breakfast. I didn't expect company this morning."

"Why, this is a meal fit for a king," Douglas re-

plied. "It's been years since I've eaten pancakes, ham and gravy. And that bread looks good, too. Did you bake it yourself, Mrs. Jukes?"

"Oh, yes, I do all my own cooking. But that bread isn't as good as I generally make. We just opened a new barrel of flour, and it doesn't seem to be as good as the last we had."

"It's no wonder that you are the best wrestler in the parish," Douglas remarked to Jake.

"Why?" the farmer asked, with his mouth full of pancake.

"Because of what you eat. Wouldn't any one be strong with such food as this?"

"But you put me down, though," Jake acknowledged, "an' you haven't been eatin' sich grub."

"Ah, it wasn't my strength, remember. It was simply a little trick I learned years ago."

"Will ye larn me the trick?" Jake asked. "I'd like to try it on Joe Preston the next time we have a bout together. My, it would surprise him."

"What, were you two wrestling this morning?" Mrs. Jukes enquired.

"Yep, an' he put me down," her husband explained. "Ye should have seen the way he did it, Susie. I struck the ground kerflop, right on my shoulders, an' they are sore yit from the thump."

No one noticed the look of wonder mingled with admiration upon Empty's face as Jake uttered these words. He forgot to eat, as he watched Douglas across the table. Any one who could put down the champion of Rixton was a marvel in Empty's eyes, and worthy of more than a passing notice. He had not forgotten how this

stranger had taken his part down by the big elm, and would not let Jake hit him the second time.

Mrs. Jukes was almost as much surprised as Empty. Though she could handle her husband and make him do what she wished, she, nevertheless, had a great admiration for his prowess as a wrestler, and was proud of his standing in the community. It was his local renown which had appealed to her when she was teaching school in Rixton, and had enabled Jake to capture her from his rivals, for Susie Perkins had been greatly admired and sought after by the young men of the place.

"Do you know anything about farm work?" she asked.

"I was brought up on a farm, and should know something about it," Douglas replied.

"But you haven't done any hard work of late, have you?"

"How do you know that?"

"Oh, I can tell by your hands. They are not hard and rough like Jake's, for instance, and your face is not burnt as if you had been out working in the sun."

Douglas smiled, and held up his hands for inspection.

"Please do not judge by these," he replied, "but rather by my brain, heart and feet. They are all pretty well worn. A week or so in the field will remedy the defects of my face and hands, and make them more like your husband's."

"I'm goin' to try ye out fer a week," Jake remarked, "an' if ye understand hayin' as well as ye do wrestlin' ye're the man fer me."

"Just for my board and lodging," Douglas added.

"Well, that's fer you to say."

"I prefer it that way."

"It's settled, then," and Jake pushed back his chair and rose from the table. "We must do the milkin', and then git into the field. There's a heap of hay to come in to-day, an' we can't dilly-dally."

Douglas soon proved that he was no novice at farm work, and he won Jake's approval by the quick and efficient way he was able to milk. But it was when once out in the field he showed what he could do. Though not hardened to the work, he exhibited his knowledge of mowing with the scythe or the machine, as well as raking and putting up the hay in bunches ready to be hauled in that afternoon.

It was a bright, beautiful day, and Douglas found it good to be out there in the open instead of being shut up in the crowded city. He was almost like a boy in his joy and enthusiasm. Everything appealed to him and brought back memories of other days; the fragrant scent of the new-mown hay, the zig-zagging butterflies, and the birds darting here and there. Though the day was hot and the perspiration at times stood out in beads on his forehead, yet he was more contented than he had been for a long time. "Why did I ever leave the country?" he asked himself. "What life so free and happy as this?" Then the thoughts which had entered his mind the night before came to him once again. "Would it not be better to live in God's open, and rove at will?" he mused. "Why should I be a slave any longer, and conform to a dry ecclesiastical system? Better to follow nature and the dictates of my own heart. What is the use of striving to help others when they do not wish to be helped?"

He found Jake a capital companion. He was not a

driver, but an encourager, and when once he saw that a man was doing his best, he was satisfied.

"Ye're all right," he told Douglas that evening after the chores had been done, and they were resting for a while on a log near the house. "I suppose ye feel a little sore?"

"Not yet," Douglas replied, "but I expect to be rather stiff in the morning after to-day's work. It will take me a little while to get hardened up, and then I'm going to have a wrestling bout with you. My, how calm the water is to-night," and he turned his eyes upon the peaceful river away to the left. "I'm going down to have a swim. The last one I had was in the harbour."

"In the harbour!" Jake exclaimed in amazement. "What in the world were ye swimmin' there fer?"

"Oh, I'll tell you some day when I've got nothing else to do. Where's the best place for a swim?"

"Most anywhere, but ye'll find the water extry good down by that old pine tree," and Jake pointed away to the left. "There are no weeds there."

It took Douglas but a few minutes to reach the river, and he walked slowly along the shore. Not a ripple disturbed the surface of the water, and the trees along the bank were mirrored in the clear depths. How good it was to be in such a place where he could think to his heart's content. No sign of human life was here, and the sweet song of a vesper sparrow was the only sound which broke the stillness of the evening. So far, he had not found Rixton to be the terrible place it had been painted, and he was beginning to think that what he had heard was mere legend. He had found the Jukes

very agreeable people, at any rate, and he believed that his stay with them would be most pleasant.

Having reached the old pine, he sat down upon the sand and bent forward to unlace his shoes. His attention, however, was suddenly arrested by the sound of violin music to his left. That it was no amateur who was playing he was well aware, but one skilled in the art. At any time such music would have appealed to him, but on an evening like this, and amid such surroundings, the effect was greatly enhanced. For a few minutes he sat and listened, afraid to move lest the charm should be dispelled. The music thrilled his soul with a peculiar feeling of responsibility. It seemed like a passionate cry for help, mingled with a desire for sympathy and understanding. It was quite evident that the unknown minstrel had suffered, and was pouring forth upon the still evening air the deep emotions of the heart. Others might hear differently, but there was only one interpretation he could give to the enchanting sound.

Presently there came to him a desire to see this skilled musician. He was beginning to realise that Rixton, no matter what others might say, was becoming a most interesting place. To encounter in one day a wrestler like Jake Jukes, and a violinist such as he was now hearing, made his coming to the parish really worth while.

Looking along the shore from whence the music came, Douglas could see nothing but trees. Stepping back, however, a few paces, he obtained a better view, and beheld not far away three persons near a large tree which was bending over the water. One was an old man seated upon the ground, with a young girl by his side.

He could not distinguish their faces, but they were evidently listening with rapt attention to a young woman who was standing nearby playing upon a violin. Douglas noted with admiration her lithe form, and the graceful poise of her head. So the musician was a woman! It came to him as a surprise, for in his mind he had pictured a man alone on the shore, giving expression to his feelings. He longed to draw nearer, that he might see her better and look into her eyes. A soul and a hand that could produce such music could belong only to a person of more than ordinary beauty, so he imagined. But he knew that if he ventured forth the charm would be broken, and he would be looked upon as an intruder. No, it was better for him to remain where he was that he might listen and adore unseen.

As he stood there and watched, the music suddenly ceased. He saw the girl sitting on the ground rise to her feet, take the old man by the hand, and lead him away. The musician alone remained, and with the violin under her arm she leaned against the tree. Was she tired? Douglas wondered. Why did she not go with the others? He was not left long in doubt, however, for in a few minutes a man emerged from among the trees and approached the waiting woman. Ah, she had remained to meet her lover, and no doubt her music had been meant for him. Perhaps he had been near at hand all the time, waiting a favourable opportunity to speak to her. Was the old man her father who objected to her lover? And was the young girl her sister who was in league with her? These thoughts passed through Douglas' mind as he stood there. It did not seem right that he should be watching these two, and yet there was something which restrained him from going away at once.

They did not seem altogether like lovers, for the young woman had stepped back as the man drew near, and kept retreating slightly whenever he approached too close.

Douglas could not hear a word that was being said, but the strange manner of the two interested him greatly. It was evident that they were engaged in an earnest conversation, though the man seemed to be doing most of the talking.

For some time the two stood near the old tree, while the shades of night deepened over the land. At length, they moved away, walking side by side, and soon disappeared among the trees. Douglas' interest was much aroused and he felt that there was some mystery connected with what he had witnessed. He longed to know something about the violinist, where she had learned to play in such a remarkable manner, and the reason of the strange compelling music.

Lost in such thoughts, he forgot all about his intended swim. He left the old pine tree and slowly retraced his steps along the shore. It was dark by the time he reached the house. He felt tired after his day's work, and was glad to go at once to the little bedroom which Mrs. Jukes had prepared for his use.

CHAPTER VII

MENDING THINGS

WEARY though he was, Douglas found it difficult to get to sleep. He thought over the various events of the day, and was not altogether dissatisfied with the results. He had made a beginning, anyway, and he hoped that events would so shape themselves that he might soon be able to get to the heart of the Church trouble, whatever it might be. He had not yet spoken to Jake about the matter, thinking it best to wait for a day or two, or until a favourable opportunity should occur.

Then the music he had heard down by the river kept running through his mind, and, try as he might, he could not silence the sound. He saw again that slight, graceful figure standing near the tree, drawing the bow skilfully across the strings of the violin. Where had she learned to play in such a manner? he asked himself. He was surprised that Rixton could produce such a musician. Was she engaged to that young man? he wondered, and, if so, what was the cause of her strange behaviour when they met? It was late when he at last fell asleep, and he dreamed of a herd of wild cattle chasing a beautiful woman through a big field, while he and Jake were unable to go to her assistance.

When he awoke in the morning the rain was pelting down upon the roof overhead. The sound filled him

with a sense of deep satisfaction and brought back childhood days when he had listened to the same music in the little room in his old home. He was glad that it was raining, as he was feeling sore after yesterday's work, and he longed for a little rest from the labour of the hay field. Early though it was, Jake was already astir. He heard him making the fire in the kitchen stove, then the rattle of milk pails, and the bang of the door as he left for the barn. Douglas tumbled out of bed, dressed, and in a few minutes was at the stable.

"What! You here?" Jake asked in surprise, as he paused in the act of picking up a milking-stool.

"Certainly, and why not?" Douglas replied.

"Oh, I didn't expect ye to be up so early, that's all. All the hired men I've ever had waited to be called."

"Why didn't you call me?"

"Thought I'd let ye sleep, as ye had a hard day of it yesterday. And, besides, it's rainin', so we can't do much to-day."

"Rain or no rain, tired or not tired, I am going to do my share while I'm here," Douglas quietly remarked, as he picked up a pail and a stool. "I don't want you to favour me in the least, though I appreciate your thoughtfulness."

After breakfast, Jake and Douglas went out into the woodhouse to grind a scythe and a cutter-bar.

"We might as well git them done while it's rainin'," Jake had said, "an' there's nuthin' else we kin do this mornin'."

Douglas turned the stone while Jake did the grinding. He was not new to the job, as he had often done it as a boy. Then, it had been a wearisome task, and

it seemed to him that the hired man always pressed as hard as he could upon the stone. But now he enjoyed the task, as it was a change from the pitching of hay.

"Have you many near neighbours?" he presently asked.

"Yes, a few," was the reply. "Sandy Barker lives below me, and Caleb Titus jist above. Of course, there's the corner with a whole bunch of houses. It's pretty well settled all along the river."

"Has Caleb Titus much of a family?"

"Naw. Jist himself an' one daughter, Polly."

"Has he a large farm?"

"Not overly large; though he doesn't attend to it. He works in the woods in the winter time, an' scratches the ground a little in the spring, an' tries to raise something, though he doesn't succeed very well. He sold a piece off the front of his place a few years ago to old Andy Strong, an' got a good price for it, so I heard."

"Who is this man Strong?" Douglas enquired.

Jake lifted the scythe from the stone and felt its edge very carefully with his thumb before answering. He seemed to be pondering something, and a peculiar smile lurked about the corners of his mouth.

"I can't jist tell ye who he is," he eventually replied. "He came off an' on to Rixton fer several years until at last he settled down here for good with his daughters."

"How many has he?"

"Two; Nell an' Nan. My, they're beauties, an' the young fellers in the whole parish are about crazy over them, especially Nell. She's a wonder, an' looks after everything, the old man included."

"What's wrong with him?"

"Oh, he's blind as a bat, an' as queer a critter as ye ever sot eyes on."

"In what way?"

"Well, he's an unbeliever, an' has a great deal to say about churches, 'ligion, an' parsons. He's down on 'em all. The young fellers hereabouts git him to talk to them, an' make believe they are mighty interested in his views. That is only their excuse fer visitin' the place, so's they kin meet Nell an' Nan. Ho, ho! it's a great joke. The old boy thinks they're listenin' to him, but they don't remember a word he says."

"Do his daughters favour any of them?"

"Not as fer as I know. They are mighty sensible girls, an' put up with the young fellers comin' to their place because it pleases their dad. He likes to express his views, an' they know it."

"Why is Mr. Strong so much down on churches, religion and parsons?" Douglas asked.

"I can't tell ye that. He's got a grouch of some kind, though I never heard him say what it is."

"Did he ever go to church?"

"Not him, though I've seen his daughters there. Nell has played the organ at times, fer she's mighty musical. My, ye should hear her play the fiddle! She makes it fairly talk."

"Where did she learn to play so well?"

"From her dad. He was a perfessor, or something like that years ago, though his playin' is pretty shaky now."

Douglas asked no more questions just then, but went on with his work, and meditated upon what he

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had heard. Perhaps this old man Strong was really the cause of much of the Church trouble in the parish. Jake might be wrong in his opinion about the young men, and they may have been greatly influenced by the words of the blind professor. He longed to see Strong that he might hear what he had to say, and at the same time to meet his daughters. How he was going to do this, he had not the least idea, though he somehow felt that he would have to wrestle with the unbeliever if he intended to make any headway in Rixton. He had won his first step in the parish as a wrestler, but to contend against firmly rooted opinions was a far more difficult undertaking. It would be all the harder if he should find Strong a stubborn, narrow-minded person, unreasonable, and firmly-settled in his views.

When dinner was over, Jake asked Douglas if he would go to the shoe-maker's for him.

"Two of the traces broke on me the other day," he explained, "an' I haven't had time to git them fixed. Ye'll find Joe Benton's place jist beyond the store."

"Shall I wait until they are mended?" Douglas asked.

"Yes, if ye want to, an' if Joe's able to do them to-day. I think he'll do 'em all right, providin' he doesn't git side-tracked on his hobby."

"What's that?"

"It's 'ligion, that's what 'tis. He's great on the Bible an' Church history. He holds service every Sunday in his house, since we've had no parson."

"Do many attend?"

"Naw. Jist him an' his wife, I guess. But Joe's a good, honest feller, an' ye'll like him. But fer pity's sake, keep him off of 'ligion, if ye expect to bring them traces back with ye to-day."

Douglas had no trouble in locating the shoe-maker's shop, where he found Joe Benton busy half-soleing a pair of men's boots. He was a man past sixty, grey-haired, and with a smooth-shaven face. His eyes were what arrested Douglas' attention. They were honest eyes, which looked clear and straight into his. There the old man's soul seemed to be shining forth, so expressive were they. Douglas thought he could read in those clear depths an unattainable longing, mingled with an appealing pathos. When he smiled, his whole face was lighted with a remarkable glory, and he appeared no longer a humble shoe-maker, but an uncrowned king. His rude bench was his throne, and the humble shop his royal palace. So it appeared to Douglas, and he wondered if others were affected in the same way.

"Are you Jake Juke's hired man, the wrestler?" the shoe-maker asked, after Douglas had told him the purpose of his visit.

"Yes, that's who I am," was the reply. "But how in the world did you hear about our wrestling match?"

"Oh, news travels fast in Rixton, especially if Empty Dempster is the carrier."

Douglas sat down upon a bench and observed Joe intently, as he gave the final touch to a shoe in his lap. Many years had passed since he had watched such work, and he recalled the old shoe-maker he used to know when a lad.

"Can you fix the traces to-day?" he enquired. "If so, I might as well wait for them."

"Yes, I'll mend them at once," and Joe put the finished shoe carefully down by its mate. "I'm not rushed this afternoon."

"You are kept busy as a rule, I suppose?"

"Yes, always mending something. I have been doing it for over thirty years now, and there is never any let-up."

"You must get very tired of it at times."

"No, I can't say I do. It gives me plenty of time to think as I sit here alone in my little shop. I often wish that I could mend everything in life as easily as I can a pair of shoes."

"Why, do you find things out of joint?" Douglas queried. "You haven't seen much of the world, I suppose?"

"I don't have to travel to see the world, sir," and Joe paused in his work and looked earnestlfiy into his visitor's face. "I can see the world right in this parish; that is, as much as I want to see of it."

"And you think there are many things here which need to be mended?"

"I certainly do. My heart is heavy all the time over the sad condition of this parish. The church is closed; the bell is never rung; and the rectory is falling into decay. But they are merely outward signs of the real state of the community. The people do not worship any more, and the children never go to Sunday school. With this spiritual sloth has come a great moral decline, and there are all kinds of sins and evil things committed of which we, as a rule, were free years ago."

"What is the cause of all this?" Douglas enquired.

"There are various reasons. The most important, I suppose, is the lack of the right kind of a clergyman, who would understand the people, and be a rèal leader. If he could win the sympathy of the majority in this parish, the rest might be overcome."

"But didn't you have good men in the past?"

"Oh, yes, we've always had good men in a way. But of late years the ones we had, as I said, didn't understand the people, and as far as I could see didn't try. They knew nothing about the country ways, and considered themselves above their people. They were always looking for some better field, and made no bones of saying so. They used no tact at all."

"But didn't the people try to help and encourage them?" Douglas asked. He was beginning to feel that Joe was looking all on one side.

"Most of the people did at first, sir, and I think that things would have come around all right if they had been let alone." Joe paused and examined the stitches he had just put in the trace. "But," he continued, "there's an influence in this parish which has to be reckoned with. I'm not going to say what it is, but if you stay here long enough you'll soon find out for yourself."

"And that influence, whatever it is, would make it hard, then, for any clergyman to work here? Is that what I gather from your words?"

"That's just it."

Douglas longed to know what this influence really was, but he felt it would be better not to enquire further just then. No doubt the shoe-maker had some good reason for not telling what he knew. The only thing, therefore, was for him to find out for himself.

"You must miss the services of the Church very much," he at length remarked.

"I do, I certainly do," Joe emphatically replied. "Though I have service in my own house every Sunday

morning, yet it doesn't seem just the same as in the House of God."

"Do any of the neighours come?"

"Not one, though I've often invited them. My wife and I are the only two since Jean left us."

"Is she your daughter?"

"Yes, the youngest, and the last of the girls to go from home. We always had a hymn or two when she was here, for Jean had a fine voice." A far-away look came into the old man's eyes as he uttered these words. There was a gleam of pride, as well, showing how much he thought of this daughter.

"Where is she now?" Douglas asked.

"She's in the city. She's been in the hospital there nigh on to three years, training to be a nurse. We're looking for her home now any day. I hope you'll meet her, sir, for my Jean is a comely girl, and as good as she is beautiful. We have been very lonely without her. She always took such an interest in Church matters, and taught in the Sunday school. The children loved her, and she did so much good. I'm not much use in the place, as I have to stay here all the time just mending things. But, Jean! my, she was a power!"

"May I come to your service next Sunday?" Douglas asked as he rose to go.

Into Joe's eyes leaped a look of pleasure.

"Would you care to come?"

"Indeed I should."

"Can you sing?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then you're doubly welcome. It will be great for us to have a stranger join in our simple service."

As Douglas moved towards the door, his attention

CHAPTER VIII

HOME FOR REPAIRS

IT was Sunday morning, and for the first time since coming to Rixton Douglas felt discontented. It was a most beautiful day, with not a ripple ruffling the surface of the river. A great peace and quietness reigned everywhere, and yet there was something lacking. He could not remember when he had awakened to the Day of Rest and found himself unable to attend the service of his Church. It did not seem right, so he mused, as he stood in front of the house looking down upon the neglected church, that he should not minister to the people. And yet he realised that it would upset all his plans if he attempted such a thing now.

He strolled over to the rectory, and walked through the fields. How he longed to repair the building and cultivate the land. He pictured to himself the vegetables he might raise, and how the whole place could be made a most delightful spot. With a suitable housekeeper, he could have a happy home, visiting his people, caring for his garden, and with some spare time for reading and study.

Hitherto, Douglas had not thought much about any one other than a paid house-keeper. But now a feeling stole into his heart that he would like to have some one else to grace the rectory—a wife, who would make it a real home. Of all the women he had met, he could not

think of one he would care to marry, or who in turn would wish to be his wife. He smiled at this idea, thinking that he was becoming sentimental. To shake off the notion, he walked rapidly across the fields toward the church. He had not visited it before, but viewed it only at a distance. Everything around the building spoke of neglect. The graveyard was thick with bushes, long grass and weeds. He observed several new-made graves, and wondered what clergyman had conducted the funeral services. The church needed painting, and the roof reshingling. He tried the big front door, but found it fastened. Through one of the side windows he was enabled to obtain a partial view of the interior. The ceiling and walls were stained, and in places the plaster had fallen off and was lying on the floor. The sight saddened him, so sitting down under the shade of a big maple tree he gazed thoughtfully at the church. What labour and high ideals had gone into the erection of that building, he mused, and how the whole parish must have rejoiced when it was completed. He pictured the animated scene on the day of its consecration, and what a crowd must have been present. He thought, too, of the part it had taken in the life of the community during the long years it had been standing there; of the baptisms, weddings, and burials, and how many had been helped by the services in this, their spiritual home. But now it was deserted, the bell rusting overhead, and the door securely locked.

For some time Douglas sat there thinking of such things. Then he rose and moved away. He needed a brisk walk to shake off the feeling of depression that had taken possession of him. Going home to the house, he found Jake stretched out comfortably under the

shade of an apple tree. Douglas sat down by his side.

"Been down to the church?" Jake enquired.

"Yes. It's pretty well deserted, isn't it? You must have had several funerals lately. Who attended the services?"

"Oh, a parson from Mapledale fer two of 'em, an' Joe Benton read the service over little Bennie Clark."

"You must feel lost without any service in the church," Douglas remarked.

"Naw, not a bit, though I must say I did like to hear the bell ring. I hain't been to church fer over three years."

"Why?"

"I didn't like the last parson we had, nor the style of them who set themselves up as great Christians."

"What about Joe Benton?"

"Oh, he's all right as fer as he's concerned, an' so is his wife. But what has religion done fer their family, I'd like to know? Their boys are all wild, an' I've heard stories about the girls since they left home."

Jake paused and bit thoughtfully at a blade of grass he was holding in his hand.

"But it ain't the Bentons I'm thinkin' so much about," he continued. "There are others. Look at Mike Gibband, fer instance, an' him a churchwarden, too. Why, he swears like a trooper, an' would do a man a mean trick whenever he could. I could tell ye what he did to poor widder Stanley."

"What was wrong with the last clergyman you had?" Douglas questioned.

"Well, he was mighty stuck up, an' thought it beneath himself to soil his nice white hands at anything. You should have seen the way he kept his barn over

there. Why, it was a fright. An' as fer his knowledge of farmin', he didn't know a thing, and as fer as I could see he didn't want to. Bless my soul, he couldn't tell a bean from a pea, nor a carrot from a turnip."

"But a man might not know anything about such things and yet be a good clergyman," Douglas reasoned.

"That's very true," and Jake ran his fingers through his hair. "We would have overlooked sich things if he had been all right as a parson. But he wasn't, fer he used no tact, an' got Si Stubbles down on him, an' so that finished him as fer as this parish is concerned."

"Did all the people follow Mr. Stubbles in disliking the clergyman?"

"Nearly all of them."

"Why was that?"

Jake looked quizzically at his companion before replying. Douglas thought of Joe Benton's action when Stubbles had been mentioned, and his interest was now much aroused.

"I guess ye'll need to understand this parish quite a bit better before ye can git that question answered," Jake explained. "Ye'll have to know more about Si Stubbles, too."

"He rules things here, then?"

"Should say he does."

"So any clergyman who wishes to get along in this parish must keep on the good side of Mr. Stubbles?"

"That's jist it. He must knuckle down to him or git out."

"But why do the people allow that?"

"Allow what?"

"Mr. Stubbles to rule things in such a way?"

"H'm, they can't help it. Why, Si Stubbles owns most of the people in this place, body an' soul. The men work fer him in the woods in the winter time, an' in his mill the rest of the year. They git nearly everything at his store, an' are generally in debt to him, so that's where he has 'em. What Si says goes in this parish, an' any one who bucks him has to git out. Several tried it in the past, but they didn't stay here long. Things got too hot fer 'em. It pays a man to keep on the good side of Si, if he expects to hold on here."

"You must be independent of him, though. You have your farm, and do not look to him for anything."

"Not a bit of it. I'm in his clutches jist as much as the rest of the folks. He buys all of my stuff, an' I haul logs fer him in the winter. It means quite a bit to me. An' besides, if Si should git down on me, why all the rest would do so, too. He's got us all in the same box."

"So, it's chiefly through him, then, that the church is closed in this parish?"

"That's about it."

"But why doesn't some other man come, say a Methodist or Baptist minister? Surely all of the people here do not belong to the Church of England?"

"Most of 'em do, but there's a sprinklin of Baptists and Methodies, with here an' there a Presbyterian. Their men did come, an' started meetin's. But they didn't stay long when Si once got after 'em. He boasts that he is a loyal member of the Church of England, an' a church warden, so he can't stand any other form of 'ligion."

"Oh, I see," Douglas mused. "It's a case of the dog in the manger."

"Put it any way ye like," Jake replied, as he once more stretched himself out on the grass. "Si Stubbles rules this place, an' I guess will rule it as long as he stays here."

Douglas looked at his watch and rose suddenly to his feet. It was later than he had imagined.

"I'm going for a walk," he said, "and will not be back for dinner."

"Where will ye git anything to eat?" Jake asked.

"Oh, I'll pick up a bite somewhere. But if I don't, I won't starve, as I had such a good breakfast."

Douglas walked rapidly up the road, for he wanted to be in time for the service at the shoe-maker's, and he had only a quarter of an hour to get there. He saw, in passing, what he supposed was the Stubbles' home. It was a large house with the grounds well kept, and surrounded by fine trees. He observed several people upon the spacious verandah, who watched him as he went by. He longed to see Stubbles, that he might judge for himself what kind of a man he was. Perhaps he was not such a terrible person, after all, and one with a little common sense and tact might handle him all right.

When Douglas reached Joe's place, he was surprised to find the door of his little shop partly open. Peering in, he saw the old man in his accustomed place, with his head buried in his hands. Thinking that he might be sick, Douglas entered and asked him what was the matter. Somewhat startled, Joe lifted his head and Douglas was shocked at the haggard expression upon his face, and the look of wretched misery in his eyes.

"What's wrong?" he asked, laying his hand upon the old man's shoulder. "Are you ill?"

"Jean's coming home," was the low reply.

"So you told me. Isn't that good news?"

"Ah, but she's coming not as I expected. She's coming home for repairs."

"For repairs! I do not understand."

"Read that, then," and Joe handed him a letter, all soiled with tears. "It's from Jean herself."

It took Douglas but a few minutes to read the scrawl, and grasp the meaning. It told of failure in the city, and that she was coming home to the care of her parents. It was easy for Douglas to read between the lines, and he knew that more was contained there than appeared on the surface.

"She's coming to-morrow," the old man moaned. "My Jean coming home for repairs!" His body shook from the vehemence of his emotion, and tears rolled down his cheeks.

"Perhaps she is only sick, and needs home care," Douglas soothed, though in his heart he well knew it was worse than that.

Joe made no reply, but sat very still looking straight before him. His eyes were fixed upon the picture of the Good Shepherd saving the wandering lamb. A struggle was evidently going on in his mind, and it seemed that he needed that scene to help him. At length he rose slowly from the bench, and turned toward a door on the right.

"We will have service now," he quietly remarked. "We would consider it an honour to have you join us."

Douglas followed him through the kitchen into a

little room beyond, where Mrs. Benton was sitting rocking herself in a splint-bottom chair. She arose as they entered, and held out her hand to the visitor. She was a small woman, dressed in plain clothes. But Douglas had eyes only for her face which, though wrinkled and care-worn, bore an expression of great sweetness, and her eyes shone with loving sympathy. She had been weeping, but she hastily brushed away her tears with the corner of her apron, as she bade the stranger welcome and offered him a chair.

On a little table rested two well-worn volumes, a Bible and a Prayer Book. Here the shoe-maker took his stand and reverently began to read the service. His voice was low, though distinct, and he seemed to feel deeply every word he uttered. Never had Douglas been so impressed by any service. He knew how the hearts of these two people were bleeding, and yet here they were taking their sorrow to the Master and laying it at His feet.

"Would you mind reading the lesson?" Joe asked, handing Douglas the opened Bible. "That is the chapter," and he placed his finger upon the page. "My eyes seem a bit dim of late."

A feeling of compunction smote Douglas' heart as he took the Book and began to read. What a deceiver he was, and what would these two sincere people think if they knew who he really was? Was he right in coming to Rixton in such a guise? he asked himself. Would it not have been better and more manly to have come in his official capacity instead of as a spy? But the thought of the failure of his predecessors somewhat soothed his troubled conscience. If the majority of the people were like the Bentons, it would be different. There was a

CHAPTER IX

EVENING GLOW

IT was the middle of the afternoon when Douglas bade the Bentons good-by and walked slowly down the road. He had many things to consider, and he wished to be off somewhere by himself. His visit to the shoe-maker's had been like a benediction, and the wonderful faith he had witnessed there, combined with the words of brave courage to which he had listened, rebuked his doubts and fears. He had been strongly tempted to give up and run away from what he knew to be his duty. He had planned to live only for himself, and wander wherever his spirit might lead. But now a longing came upon him to stay and help those two old lonely people, and comfort them in their time of need. It was the first link which was to bind him to this parish, the golden link of divine sympathy. Little did he realise that afternoon what the next link would be in his life's mystic chain.

It was a hot day and the river looked alluring and refreshing. He thought of the big tree down by the shore, and of its cooling shade. He decided to spend the rest of the afternoon there, alone with his thoughts and his violin. There was something in his soul which he could express only upon his beloved instrument. He had played very little since coming to Rixton. Twice

he had amazed the Jukes' children with lively airs, and one evening he had played for their parents. He smiled to himself as he thought of its soothing effect upon Jake who had fallen asleep in his chair.

There was no sign of life in the house as he entered. Mrs. Jukes and the children had gone to visit a neighbour, and Jake was sound asleep upon the sofa in the sitting-room. Going at once to his little room, Douglas took his violin out of its case, and, carrying it under his arm, he slipped quietly out of the house and made his way swiftly down over the fields toward the river.

He was very hot and it was refreshing to sit under the shade of the tree with his back against the big ice-scarred trunk. In fact, he was so comfortable that he had no inclination to play upon his violin which was lying by his side. It was good to sit there and think. Again the old lure of the freedom of a wandering life swept upon him, and the impression the Bentons had made gradually diminished. His eyes followed several swallows as they darted here and there. What a happy free-from-care life they must lead, he mused. They come and go at will, and in a few weeks they will be speeding away to the sunny southland. Why should the birds have privileges greater than human beings?

And as he sat there a drowsiness stole over him which he made no effort to resist. In a few minutes the world of sight and sound was blotted out, and he slept. He awakened with a start and looked around. Then he glanced at his watch and found that it was four o'clock, and that he must have been asleep for about half an hour. What was it that aroused him? he wondered. No one was in sight, and he could hear nothing. A sense of loneliness suddenly took possession of him.

Almost mechanically, he picked up his violin and drew the bow across the strings. At first, he played several old familiar hymns, but ere long he drifted off into dreamland to the varying fancies of heart and mind. On and on he played, unheeding time and place. The music varied, now soft and low, and again rising to grand triumphant strains.

At length he paused, and looked quickly around. A feeling possessed him that he was being watched. Neither was he mistaken, for a girl at once stepped forth from behind a clump of bushes and advanced toward him. He felt sure he had seen her before, but just where he could not at the moment remember. She was very beautiful, and her face glowed with animation, and her eyes sparkled with delight.

"Oh, I heard you," she laughingly began. "You thought you were alone, did you?"

"I certainly did," Douglas replied. "But I am delighted to see you, as I was getting tired of my own company. Do you like music."

"I like yours, oh, so much! I can never forget the first time I heard you play."

"Heard me play!" Douglas repeated in surprise. "When was that?"

"Why, don't you remember?" and the girl's eyes opened wide in astonishment. "It was that awful night in the city when my father was playing, and you came and took the violin from him, and——"

"You don't mean to tell me that you are that girl?" Douglas interrupted, as he leaped to his feet. "Why, yes, you are the very same though not so pale and frightened. I knew I had seen you somewhere before, but could not remember just where."

"Isn't it funny!" and the girl's silvery laugh rang out. "How in the world did you happen to come here?"

"Oh, I'm working for Jake Jukes, that's all."

"I know that. You're the man who put him on his back. My, you must be a great wrestler!"

"Why, who told you about that?" Douglas smilingly questioned.

"Empty, of course. He knows everything that goes on in this place."

"And tells it, too?"

"Why, yes. He's as good as a newspaper. Nell says we wouldn't know what is going on but for Empty."

"Who is Nell?"

"She's my sister, and she's reading to daddy now, in front of the house. You must come with me at once and see her, for I've told her about you a thousand times."

"About me!"

"Yes. How you played on the street, and were so good to us. And daddy will be so glad to meet you, too, for he has been feeling so badly ever since that night that he didn't thank you for your kindness."

The girl's face was flushed with excitement, and she was anxious to rush off to tell of the great discovery she had made. But she wished to take her prize with her, and Douglas was nothing loath to go, as he longed to meet the old man he had seen in the city. He believed that he was Andy Strong, of whom Jake had spoken, and who had "a great deal to say about churches, 'ligion an' parsons," and who was "down on 'em all." He felt that he must be prepared for another wrestling match far different from his bout with

Jake. He might find in this blind musician an able opponent, and it would be well for him to be on his guard.

The girl was delighted when Douglas, tucking his violin under his arm, walked along by her side. She was an excellent companion and chatted incessantly.

"This is where we skate in the winter," she told him, pointing to the river. "Oh, it is such fun when the ice is good. The boys come at night and build great fires and we skate around them."

"Do you go to school?" Douglas asked when the girl paused an instant.

"Not now. You see, I have to help Nell, and that takes much of my time. But daddy teaches me. He is a great scholar, and knows most everything. He was a college professor before he became blind."

"Was he?" Douglas asked in surprise. "At what college?"

"Passdale; and it was such a lovely place. My dear mother died when we were there. I was only a little girl when we left, but I remember it well. Nell was at college when father became blind, and she felt so badly about coming away before she could graduate."

"And have you lived here ever since?"

"Oh, yes. There is no other place for us to go."

"Do you like it?"

"Sure. I am happy wherever daddy and Nell are. We have such great times together. But here we are right at the house. It wasn't far, was it?"

Douglas did not reply for he was held spell-bound by the beautiful and interesting scene before him. In a comfortable arm-chair sat the blind musician listening intently to what his daughter was reading. She

was seated upon the ground by his side, with a book lying in her lap. It was only for an instant, however, that Douglas was privileged to watch her unobserved, but it was sufficient for him to note the rare charm of her face and form.

"Oh, daddy! Nell!" the girl cried as she rushed forward. "You can't guess who is here?"

At these words the fair reader lifted her head and her eyes rested upon the stranger.

"It's the man who played for us in the city," the girl explained. "Isn't it wonderful that I have found him!"

An expression of pleasure swept over the young woman's face, as she at once rose to her feet and held out her hand.

"Any one who has befriended my father and sister is welcome here," she quietly remarked. "Father," and she turned partly around, "this is the man you have told us so much about. Nan has brought him to see you."

"I am delighted to meet you, sir," the old man replied, as he took Douglas' hand. "I have wanted to thank you ever since that night you helped us in the city. Get Mr. ——"

"Handyman," Douglas assisted.

"Handyman, that's a good name. Nan, get him a chair and make him comfortable."

"I am sorry that I have interrupted the reading, sir," Douglas apologised. "It was your daughter who brought me here. I do not need a chair, as I prefer to sit upon the ground."

"I am so pleased that you have come," the old man replied. "You must have supper with us. We have

it out here on the grass when the afternoon is fine and warm. Come, Nell, get it ready."

"Please do not go to any trouble on my account," Douglas protested.

"It is no trouble," Nell assured him. "It is father's supper time, anyway. He always like to have it early, especially on Sunday. You two can have a nice chat together. Come, Nan, I want you."

As Douglas looked around he was surprised to find what a beautiful spot it really was. The house nestled in the midst of fine elm and maple trees. Surrounding the house was a garden, consisting of vegetables and berries of several kinds. Part of the land was in grass, not yet cut. About the place was a strong page wire fence which extended almost to the river.

"You have a beautiful place here, sir," Douglas remarked.

"Indeed it is. A happy home and a perfect day; what more could one desire? 'The Lord hath done great things for us already, whereof we rejoice'."

Douglas gave a slight start of surprise as the old man slowly uttered these words. Surely, if he were an unbeliever he would not quote Scripture in such a reverent manner.

"It is good that you can view it that way, sir. Few people ever think of being thankful for what they receive."

"That is where they make a sad mistake. I have learned through long years that Ezra of old was right when he told the people to turn from weeping and to 'drink the sweet.' Before this blindness came upon me I was something like Saul of Tarsus, always kicking against the pricks, or in other words, the dictates of

"You must have found your blindness a great handicap, sir."

"You and others might think so," and the old man smiled. "But there is an ancient proverb which tells us that when God closes a door he always opens a window. It was so with sightless Milton, and though I do not class myself with him, nevertheless, it has been true in my case. It was Emerson who gave us that wonderful essay on Compensation, and he knew whereof he wrote."

"But how have you managed to prepare this work of yours?" Douglas questioned. "You surely must have had some assistance."

"Nell has been my guardian angel ever since my blindness. She does all my writing, reads the plays and my notes to refresh my memory. She was reading King Lear this afternoon, and I was much stirred by the sad trials of the poor old king. I mentally compared my lot with his and found that the advantage is mine. He had no home, two ungrateful daughters, and, as far as I can learn, no 'shadow of a rock in a weary land.' I have a comfortable dwelling, small though it is, two good and loving daughters, a work which gives me great pleasure, and the hope of a sure abiding place not made with hands. What more could a man desire?"

"You are indeed to be congratulated," Douglas replied. "And much pleasure lies ahead of you when your book is published. You will have the satisfaction of knowing that it will be of great interest and assistance to many. I, for one, shall look forward to reading it."

"Will you really?" and the old man's face beamed

with pleasure. "But perhaps you would like to see it in manuscript? I have not shown it to any one outside my own household. You are the first I have talked to in this way about my work. Nell! Nan!" he called.

"What is it, father?" Nell asked, as she at that instant appeared carrying a large tray in her hands.

"Bring the work, Nell. I want to show it to Mr. Handyman."

"Suppose you wait until after supper, father," his daughter suggested. "Everything is all ready, and when we are through, you can show it to Mr. Handyman."

"But I need it now."

"Very well, then," and Nell gave the order to Nan.

It took but a few minutes to spread the white cloth upon the grass and arrange the dishes.

"I am afraid this is a very humble supper," Nell apologised, as she sat down upon the ground and began to pour the tea.

"Surely you do not call this humble!" Douglas replied. "It has been a long time since I have seen such bread and cake. And what delicious strawberries!"

"They are Nell's," the professor proudly explained. "She is the gardener here."

"What about Nan, father? You must give her some credit."

"Oh, I don't count, especially when it comes to farming," and Nan gave her pretty head a slight toss. "I'm willing to let Nell take all the credit."

Douglas felt perfectly at home now. It was such a bright and happy time, and he was sorry when the meal was finished. He could not understand the mystery surrounding the visit of the professor and his

daughter to the city, begging on the streets for money. Why had they done it? he asked himself, when they seemed to have everything that they needed.

"Now, Nan, bring me my box of cigars," her father ordered when supper was over.

"Cigars!" the girl exclaimed in surprise. "Why, daddy, you have been keeping them as if they were precious jewels."

"I know it, dear. But jewels must be used sometime, and so must cigars. I have kept them for rare days, and this is one of them. Since my old friend Dr. Royden visited me, I have had no one to take a keen interest in my work until to-day. When he sent me those cigars the following Christmas, he wrote that they were extra good ones, and were to be kept for special occasions. My old pipe will serve when I am alone, but to-day we must have cigars."

Douglas noticed that Nell was much pleased to see her father in such excellent spirits. She touched the match to his cigar, and watched him as he blew the smoke into the air with considerable relish. What a picture she would make sitting there, he thought. She seemed to be wholly unaware of her charm and grace of manner, reminding him of some beautiful flower radiating an unconscious influence of sweetness, purity and joy.

"This is one of the most delightful afternoons I have ever spent," Douglas remarked. "What a beautiful place you have here, with the river right near, and the spire of the church showing above the tree tops. I wish I were an artist. By the way, I was around the church this morning, and everything shows signs of neglect. It struck me as rather sad and strange."

As there was no reply, he glanced toward Nell and

was surprised to see an anxious expression upon her face. She gave her head a slight shake and held up a warning finger. He looked quickly at her father, and saw that his face had undergone a remarkable change. He was sitting motionless, clutching his cigar between the fingers of his right hand. Presently, his lips moved and he spoke in short, jerky sentences.

"Strange, you ask?" he demanded. "Why strange? What else could be expected? Half-fledged parsons strutting around as if they owned the universe. Little wonder the church is closed. And what of the people? Look at the leaders in this parish."

"Hush, hush, father, dear," Nell interposed. "Don't get excited."

"I'm not excited; I'm just stating plain facts. You know about Si Stubbles as well as I do."

"But Mr. Handyman is a stranger, remember, father, and we must not trouble him with such things on this his first visit."

"Excuse me, sir," and the old man leaned forward, as if he would look into his visitor's face. "Nell is quite right; she is always right, and I shall say no more about this painful subject to-day."

Nell at once began to gather up the neglected supper dishes, and Douglas felt that it was about time that he was going. He noticed that she seemed somewhat nervous and excited. At first he thought it was due to her father's words, but as he caught her giving a quick and an occasional glance toward the shore, he believed that she was expecting to meet some one there in a few minutes. He wondered who it was, and he felt that Nell was not altogether pleased at the idea of seeing the one who was expecting to meet her there. The thought

gave him considerable satisfaction, though he could not explain why.

"You will come again soon, will you not?" the professor asked, as Douglas bade him good-by.

"I should like to very much," was the reply. "I am most anxious to see your book, and hear more about it."

"Certainly, certainly. That will give me great pleasure. I intended to discuss it with you this evening, but I do not feel equal to it now."

"And I want to hear some of your wonderful music," Nell remarked. "I am so sorry that you have not played anything this evening."

"There is nothing wonderful about it, I assure you, Miss Strong. Just ordinary music."

"It is wonderful," Nan declared. "I have heard you twice now, and I guess I know. And when you come next time, remember you're not going to play all the time, nor talk book nor Church matters; you're going to talk to me. I've got a whole string of questions I want to ask you, and this afternoon I've had to be as mum as an oyster."

"All right, then," Douglas laughingly replied. "I shall see that you are not overlooked the next time I come."

The western sky was all aglow as Douglas walked slowly along the road. There was a sweet peace over meadow and forest. The thought of Nell brought a thrill to his heart and a strange new peace into his soul, It was the mystic glow, the prelude of the coming night, and the dawn of a new to-morrow.

CHAPTER X

PRIDE AND IMPUDENCE

IT was not easy for Douglas to get to sleep that night. He thought much about the Bentons and their anxiety over their wayward daughter. How sad it was that a young life should be so quickly and easily ruined in the city. He knew that there were many such cases, of mere girls, carefully reared, who were drawn to the city only to be singed or ruined, as moths by the glaring flame. An angry feeling came into his heart, as he recalled how little was being done to keep such girls from destruction. He thought of Dr. Rannage, and his indifference to such matters. Instead of talking, always talking, he could accomplish so much by throwing the weight of his influence as rector of St. Margaret's into the cause.

From the Bentons and their troubles, his mind drifted off to the professor and his daughters. He became greatly puzzled over their position. They had a comfortable home, and seemed to be doing well. Why, then, was it necessary for the blind old man and Nan to beg on the city streets? Did Nell know about it? he wondered. A vision of her beauty and grace of manner rose before him. What strength of character she seemed to possess, and how thoughtful she was of her father's comfort. But what was the mystery surrounding the man she was in the habit of meeting by the

old tree on the shore? It was quite evident that her father knew nothing about it. He longed to know more, and the professor's antagonism to "parsons" and church "leaders in the parish."

He thought over these problems the next morning as he worked in the field. Jake might know something, but he did not care to ask him. He did not wish his employer to have any idea that he was interested in the Strongs. Though he would not acknowledge it to himself, yet his hesitation, in fact, was due to the feeling that in some way the real secret of his heart might be revealed. He did not wish to let others have the slightest hint of the deep impression Nell had already made upon him.

Just as they had finished dinner, a neighbour, driving down the road, left a message for Jake. It was from Si Stubbles, who wanted Jake to help him that afternoon with his hay. He was short-handed at the mill and could not spare a man for the field.

"That's jist like Si," Jake growled, as the neighbour drove away. "He's always thinkin' of himself, an' can't seem to see that others have hay to git in."

"But you don't have to go, do you?" Douglas asked. "It isn't fair to ask you to leave your own hay."

"H'm, that's all very well in theory. But I guess ye don't know Si yit. If I don't help him this afternoon, he'll never fergit it, an' next winter, when I want a job with my team, he'll remember it. Si wouldn't fergit, not on yer life."

"Suppose I go, then, in your place," Douglas suggested. "It will be better for you to stay here as you know more about your own work."

"Would ye mind?" Jake asked, much relieved. "You will do jist as well as me."

Douglas was only too glad to go. He did want to meet Si Stubbles of whom he had heard so much, and this was too good an opportunity to miss. He would, no doubt, see Stubbles, and thus be able to form an opinion of the man without arousing any suspicion. He would be a farm-hand and nothing more.

The Stubbles' house was an imposing one, situated but a short distance from the main highway. A spacious verandah ran around the front and sides, several feet from the ground. Everything about the place was in excellent condition, the lawn well kept, and the hedges neatly trimmed. To protect the grounds from trespassers, a strong wire fence had been erected along the road, and the gate leading to the house was always kept closed. A board fastened to the gate bore the imposing name of "The Castle" in bright gilded letters.

As Douglas opened the gate and entered, a team had just rounded the corner of the house on its way to the barn. As it came in front of the house, Stubbles himself appeared upon the verandah, carrying a table napkin in his hand, for he had not yet finished his dinner. He was in no pleasant frame of mind, and was furiously berating the teamster.

"What do you mean by driving in front of the house?" he demanded. "Don't you know any better?"

"I've got to git that hay down there in the corner," the teamster surlily replied. "If I don't go in this way, how am I to git out, I'd like to know? I can't turn down there."

"Carry the hay out, then, you lazy rascal."

"It'll take me all the afternoon to do it, an' then ye'll growl at me if I don't git done before night."

"None of your impudence to me," Stubbles roared. "I'll make an example of you if you dare to speak that way again."

He was livid with anger, and, forgetting where he was, he took a step forward as if he would then and there chastise the man with his own hands. As he did so, he stepped off the platform, and with a wild shriek and a frantic effort to save himself, he went headfirst down the steps to the ground below.

Douglas had been standing not far off listening with considerable interest to the angry conversation between master and man. But when he saw Stubbles take the wild plunge, he rushed forward and picked up the injured man. The latter was groaning and cursing, contending that he was killed, and that the teamster was to blame for the accident.

Lifting him in his arms, Douglas carried him up the steps just as Mrs. Stubbles came from the house.

"Oh! what is the matter?" she cried. "What has happened to Simie?"

"He's had a bad fall," Douglas replied. "Hold the door open while I carry him into the house. Show me where to lay him."

Into the sitting-room he carried the wounded man, and placed him upon a large sofa near the window. Mrs. Stubbles followed, and stood over her husband, wringing her hands in despair.

"Are you much hurt, Simie?" she asked. "Shall I send for the doctor?"

"Shut up your bawling!" her husband ordered. "I'm not killed, though I thought I was at first. Get

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some warm water and bathe my bruises. Confound that teamster! I'll discharge him at once. What business had he to drive in front of the house and then talk back to me as he did? When is Ben coming back?"

"He expected to get home this morning," Mrs. Stubbles replied.

"He expected to do so, did he? H'm, he's always expecting to do things he never does. He should have been here to look after the haying. I've got too many things on my mind already without having to bother with that."

"Don't be too hard on the dear boy, Simie. He is to bring the girls, you know. They must have delayed him."

"Yes, yes, that's just like you; always excusing Ben, the worthless scamp. If he were as interested in business as he is in running around in the car and spending so much time in the city, what a help he would be to me. But hurry up with that water, can't you? My, I'm sore!"

"You won't need me any more now, I suppose," Douglas remarked when Mrs. Stubbles had left the room. "I might as well get to work."

"Who are you, anyway?" the injured man asked, turning his little squinting eyes upon Douglas' face. For the first time he seemed to realise that it was a stranger who had assisted him.

"I am John Handyman, Jake Jukes' help," was the reply. "I have come to give you a hand with the hay this afternoon."

"And isn't Jake coming?"

"No. He has hay of his own to get in, and so I offered to come in his stead."

"Just like Jake," Stubbles growled, "always thinking of himself. He knows very well what a fix I am in. I don't know what this place is coming to, anyway. One can't get a neighbour to do a hand's turn, and the men you hire these days are as impudent as the devil."

"Don't you worry about the hay," Douglas soothed. "We can get it in all right this afternoon."

"Do you know anything about haying?"

"I was brought up on a farm, and should know something about it."

"You look big and strong enough," and Stubbles viewed him from head to foot. "Say, are you the chap who beat Jake in a wrestling bout lately?"

"So you heard about that little encounter, did you?"

"Oh, yes, I naturally hear of such things sooner or later. But what are you doing here, anyway? You don't look like a man who has been in the habit of hiring out."

"I'm just trying to earn my daily bread, and farming suits me at the present time."

"I suppose I'll have to put up with you," Stubbles growled. "Get to work at once, and no fooling, mind."

Douglas found the teamster a pleasant working companion, who loaded the hay on the wagon.

"How is Si feelin' now?" he enquired.

"Oh, I guess he's all right. He had a nasty fall and might have been killed."

"H'm, that old cuss won't die that way. It would be too easy a death. If he doesn't bust when he gits in one of them mad fits of his, he'll be skinned alive by somebody one of these days. I'd like to be around an' hear him squeal. It would make up fer a great deal of impudence I've stood, to say nuthin' of his

confounded pride, as well as the whole darn family. But I kin put up with Si better than I kin with Ben; he's the limit."

"What's the matter with him?"

"Well, Si knows a little about farmin', but Ben knows no more about it than I do about harnessin' up a baby with pins, strings, ribbons, an' all its other gear. Ben thinks he knows, an' that's where he makes a fool of himself. He gives orders which no one in his right mind would think of obeyin', an' then he gits as mad as blazes when ye don't do as he says."

"Is Ben the only son?" Douglas asked.

"Thank goodness, yes. One is bad enough, dear knows, but if there were more, ugh!"

"What does Ben do?"

"Do? Well, I wouldn't like to tell ye."

"Does he work at anything, I mean?"

"Not a tap. He depends upon his dad fer a livin'. See what he did this mornin'. Instead of stayin' home an' lookin' after the hayin', he went to the city. That's what he's always doin'; runnin' away when there's work to be done."

"He was home yesterday, was he not?"

"Y'bet yer life he was, especially in the evenin'. He's ginerally around about that time."

"Why?"

"Oh, he's struck on the old professor's daughter. Her father doesn't like the Stubbles crowd, an' so Ben sneaks around there after he's in bed."

"Isn't it strange that the professor's daughter would do such a thing?"

"Now ye've got me," and the teamster gave a savage thrust at a forkful of hay Douglas had just handed

up. "The whole thing is a mystery. Nell's as fine a girl as ever wore shoe-leather, an' why she meets that feller in the evenin' beats me."

Douglas made no reply to these words, but went on quietly with his work. So it was Ben Stubbles who met Nell Strong every night by the old tree! Surely she must know something about his life if what the teamster had just told him were true. He could not understand it. She did not seem like a woman who would have anything to do with such a worthless character. And yet she was meeting him regularly, and at the same time deceiving her blind old father.

The hay in the corner field had all been loaded, and the teamster was stooping for the reins, when the raucous honk of an auto caused him to pause and look toward the road.

"It's Ben an' the girls now," he exclaimed. "Ye'd better open the gate."

"Oh, I guess they will get through all right," Douglas replied.

"No, ye'd better go," the teamster urged. "Ben'll be as mad as the devil if ye don't. If ye won't, then I'll have to git down an' do it. There, he's tootin' his horn agin. He's pretty mad, I can tell ye that."

Carrying his fork over his shoulder, Douglas walked deliberately across the field toward the gate. He did not wish to hurry, as he wanted to see how angry Ben could become, and what he would do.

"Get a move on there, you lazy devil!" Ben shouted. "Didn't you hear the horn?"

Douglas had almost reached the gate, when he suddenly stopped and stared at the man in the car. He had seen that face before only for a few seconds be-

neath the electric light at Long Wharf on the waterfront. But he would have known it anywhere, for it had been indelibly impressed upon his memory. So Ben Stubbles was the contemptible coward who had pushed that woman into the water and left her to her fate! He had often longed to come face to face with that man, and he had planned what he would do when they met. But here he was before him, haughty and impudent, Nell's lover, and the son of the autocrat of Rixton.

"What in h—— are you staring at?" Ben demanded. "Didn't you ever see human beings before? Open the gate, and be damned quick about it, too."

The blood surged madly through Douglas' veins, and to relieve his feelings he clutched the gate and tore it open. The occupants of the car were greatly amused at his alacrity, and attributed it to fear.

"That stirred your stumps, all right, didn't it?" Ben sneered, as the car lurched past and then sped up the drive-way.

Douglas closed the gate, fastened it, and hastened to the barn where the teamster was awaiting him. He climbed into the loft and stowed away the hay as it was handed up to him. At times he hardly knew what he was doing, so greatly was his mind agitated. Why had he not given that fellow the sound thrashing he deserved? And yet he was thankful that he had controlled himself, as he might have spoiled all his plans had he given way to hasty action. He worked with a feverish haste all that afternoon, and talked but little. This change puzzled the teamster, and he advised him to take his time.

"It's no use killin' yerself," he told him. "Si Stubbles won't thank ye if ye work yer head off."

"I want to get through with this job," Douglas replied. "I'm not working by the day as you are, and Jake needs me."

When the last of the hay had been unloaded, Douglas left the barn and started for the road. He had not seen Ben since the encounter at the gate, and he was hoping that he would not meet him again that afternoon. He did not feel altogether sure of himself, and he needed time and quietness to think carefully over what he had better do.

He was part way down to the road when he heard some one calling. Stopping and looking back, he saw that it was Ben hurrying after him. As he approached, Douglas saw that his manner was altogether changed, and he seemed quite affable. He was dressed in a white tennis-suit, and he looked cool and self-possessed.

"Say," he began, "I understand you play the fiddle."

"Well, what of it?" Douglas curtly questioned.

"You really do, then?"

"Yes, when I feel like it."

"Won't you feel like it to-night? You see, there's to be a dance in the hall this evening, but the man who generally plays is sick."

"Can't you get any one else?"

"No one who can really play. There is a chap who tries to, but you would think he was filing a saw instead of playing a fiddle."

"Perhaps I can't do any better."

"Oh, you'll be all right. Jake and his wife have heard you, and so has Empty."

"And Empty spread the report, did he?"

"Yes. But, say, you'll play, won't you?"

Douglas did not reply at once. He wondered what Ben would say if he told him what he knew about his contemptible act at Long Wharf. He did not want to play at the dance, and yet he knew it would be too good an opportunity to miss. He would see many of the young people of Rixton, and learn things which might prove of great assistance.

"Where is the hall?" he at length asked.

"Down at Kane's corner, about a mile and a half from here."

"What time does the dance begin?"

"Oh, about nine o'clock. The crowd won't get there much before that."

"Very well, then, I will be there and do the best I can."

which attracted his special attention. They danced well, and seemed greatly devoted to each other. The man was good-looking, and a fine specimen of physical strength. His partner was of medium height, neatly dressed, and remarkably pretty. Her eyes danced with pleasure, and her whole body moved in a graceful rhythm to the music, and occasionally she cast a grateful glance toward the player. She evidently enjoyed good music when she heard it. Everywhere there seemed to be perfect peace and harmony, and to Douglas the dancers appeared like one big family. They all knew one another, and were happy together.

During the intermission which followed the first dance, Ben Stubbles and his sisters, Miss Annabel and Miss Maria, arrived. They were accompanied by Nell, who looked, Douglas thought, prettier than ever. She had no right to come with the Stubbles, so thought he, and she seemed to be out of place with them.

A new atmosphere now pervaded the room. The feeling of harmony had vanished, and it was easy for Douglas to tell that this was due to the presence of Ben and his sisters. Their pride and haughtiness were most apparent, and Ben dominated the gathering.

He and Nell were partners in the first dance. Douglas' eyes followed them as they moved around the room, and in and out among the others. Nell fascinated him, though it was quite evident that she was not happy. There was no light of pleasure in her eyes, and her face was unusually pale. Though she danced well, yet she had the appearance of one who was moving almost mechanically. This appealed to Douglas more than if she had shown a great vivacity of spirit. There was something tragic about her face and manner, which, in

fact, was almost akin to despair. What could it be? the player wondered. How he longed to know the mystery surrounding her young life, and why she was acting a part for which she evidently had no liking.

When the dance was finished, Nell came to where Douglas was sitting and took a chair by his side. A slight sigh of relief escaped her lips, which Douglas was not slow to notice.

"Are you tired?" he asked.

"Very," was the low reply. "I have been working hard all day, and this dance is too much for me."

"You dance well. It was a great pleasure to watch you."

"Was it?" and she looked at him with large, grateful eyes. "No one could help dancing well with such music. This is something new for you, is it not?"

"What makes you think so?"

"It is merely a notion of mine. We have never had such playing here before."

"I suppose you know every one here?" Douglas queried, wishing to change the subject of conversation.

"Oh, yes. I know them quite well."

"Who, then, is that fine-looking young man just across from me with the pretty girl by his side?"

"That is Tom Morrison, who, next to Jake Jukes, is the best wrestler in the parish. The girl is Susie Stephenson. They are to be married in September, so it is reported."

"They seem to be very happy in each other's company."

"They are now," was all the information Nell vouchsafed in reply, and then became suddenly silent.

This was the only conversation Douglas had with

Nell that evening. She was too much in demand to remain long off the floor, tired though she was. Douglas noticed that Ben did not miss a dance, and that whenever he came near Tom Morrison there was some trouble. Ben seemed to make a special effort either to crowd him off the floor or to interfere with his movements. Tom endeavoured to keep out of his way and not to make any trouble. It was plain that he was very angry, for his face had lost its bright, sunny expression and was dark and lowering. His habit of always retreating puzzled Douglas. "Why doesn't he give the impudent fellow warning to leave him alone?" he asked himself. 'I know what I should do. That cad deserves a thrashing, if ever any one did, and I believe Tom could do it without any trouble."

During the fifth dance Ben again claimed Nell as his partner. They had not been long on the floor when Ben became suddenly agitated. His face went white as death, and his staring eyes were turned toward the door. Douglas, too, looked, and the surprise he received caused him to stop playing. There, looking in at the open door, was the face of a woman. He remembered it at once, for it was the face of the same woman he had rescued from the harbour at Long Wharf. He glanced toward Ben, and saw that he had left Nell and was moving slowly toward the door.

There was a breathless hush, now, in the hall, as all watched to see what would happen next. The face at the door had been withdrawn, and as Ben passed out into the night Douglas again struck up the music, and the dance was continued. Nell sat apart by herself. Her face was very pale, and her hands lying in her lap were clenched hard together. Many curious glances

"I shall not play another note," he calmly began, "unless Mr. Stubbles decides to behave in a proper manner."

"What's that?" Ben demanded, somewhat surprised that any one should dare to rebuke him.

"Didn't you hear what I said?" Douglas asked, as he laid aside his violin and rose to his feet. "I said that I would not play another note unless you decide to behave in a proper manner."

"Do you mean to insinuate that I have not been behaving myself?" Ben retorted.

"I did more than insinuate. And I say further that you have been behaving disgracefully and not at all like a gentleman."

"You impudent cur," Ben roared as he stepped forward. "How dare you speak to me like that? Take back those words at once or I'll make an example of you."

"Come and do it, then. I will meet you half way," and Douglas advanced toward him as he spoke.

But Ben hesitated. He found himself in a fix, and did not know how to get out of the tangle. His bluffs had always been effective in the past, and no one had dared to oppose him simply because he was Simon Stubbles' son. But here was a man, a stranger, who looked very big to him, just then, standing before him and challenging his right to rule. Ben was no fighter, and no one knew it better than himself. He was a coward at heart, and his present embarrassing position unnerved him. He glanced quickly around and seeing the eyes of all riveted upon him made him angry. If he should back down, he well knew that he would be the laughing-stock of the whole parish.

"Are you going to take back those words?" he at length found voice to ask.

"Not unless you make me," Douglas calmly replied. "Now is your chance."

"Do you realise who I am?" Ben roared, thinking to intimidate his opponent.

"I have a fairly good idea. But that doesn't make any difference. It's you I am dealing with now, and not your father."

"But I can drive you out of this parish. I can make it so hot for you that you won't dare to stay here another day."

"H'm," and Douglas gave a slight sarcastic laugh. "Why don't you do it, then? Here is your chance. Make it hot for me, and let me feel some of your great driving power."

These deliberate and tantalising words stirred Ben to the highest pitch of anger. He threw all discretion to the winds, and raved, cursed and stamped in his fury.

"Stop that," Douglas sternly ordered, stepping forward and laying his right hand firmly upon his shoulder. "If you have no respect for yourself, have it for the ladies who are present."

Ben's only reply was to throw aside the warning hand and hit his opponent a blow in the face. Like lightning Douglas suddenly reached out, seized Ben in his arms, lifted him bodily from the floor, and hurried with him toward the door. Ben tore and scratched like a wildcat in his efforts to free himself. But he was helpless in the powerful grip, and soon he found himself tumbling down the steps leading to the hall.

Douglas stood for a few seconds at the door looking

out into the night. Then he turned and walked slowly back across the room, picked up his violin and put it into its case.

"I think it best to discontinue the dance," he told the people who were watching him with keenest interest. "I am in no mood for playing any more to-night."

As he spoke his eyes happened to rest upon the Stubbles sisters, who were standing together on the opposite side of the hall. Scorn and anger were depicted upon their faces as they glared upon him. It was the elder, Miss Annabel, who gave the parting thrust. She stepped quickly forward into the middle of the room, and looked about over the gathering.

"When you have another dance," she began, "see to it that you get some one to play who has the instincts of a gentleman. Pa will be greatly annoyed when he hears how our pleasant evening has been spoiled, and by an unknown farm-hand at that." She emphasised "farm-hand" and cast a look of withering scorn upon Douglas.

The latter bowed slightly before this outburst, and picked up his violin.

"I feel that all the reasonable ones here to-night know quite well who spoiled the dance," he replied. "They can judge for themselves who has shown the want of the instincts of a true gentleman."

Having said this, he moved swiftly toward the door and disappeared into the night.

CHAPTER XII

ASTRAY ON THE HILLS

LEAVING the hall, Douglas walked slowly up the road. He had partly expected to find Ben waiting outside, but he was nowhere to be seen. Douglas had not gone far, however, ere an auto overtook him and went by at great speed. He knew very well who was the driver, though he could not tell how many were in the car. He smiled grimly to himself as he thought of Ben's anger, and he wondered in what way he would try to wreak a suitable revenge. He realised now that the Stubbles were his principal opponents in the place, and he felt quite sure that they had been the chief cause of the trouble in church affairs in the past. Why did the people allow them to rule in such an autocratic way? he asked himself. Surely there was some one strong enough to oppose their pride and impudence.

It was a beautiful evening, and Douglas was in no hurry to reach home. Several teams overtook him, and as they approached, the animated voices became stilled. All knew the silent man walking alone in the night, and they waited until they were well past before resuming their conversation.

At length he came to the brow of the hill where it dipped into the valley, and here a most glorious scene was presented to his view. Beyond, lay the river, without a ripple disturbing its surface. Above, shone the

moon, and across the water a stream of light lay like a path of burnished silver, leading to a world of enchantment beyond. Douglas' heart was deeply stirred at the sight, and he sat down under a fir which stood on the edge of a clump of trees, and leaned back against the trunk. He feasted his soul upon the magnificent panorama before him. It was just what he needed to dispel the miasma which had been gathering around him owing to his recent contact with the Stubbles. The air, rich and fragrant with the scent of new-mown hay, stimulated him like a magic elixir. Mother Nature was in one of her most gentle moods, and with unseen fingers soothed both heart and brain of her ardent worshipper.

Ere long, the sound of voices fell upon his ears, causing him to listen attentively. Several people were walking slowly along the road discussing the incident at the hall.

"He's in for it now, all right." It was a man who spoke.

"What can Ben do?" It was a woman who asked the question. "He was given the chance to fight it out there and then, but he acted like a fool."

"Ha, ha, Ben was cornered for once to-night. It needed a stranger to bring him to his senses."

"Who is that man, anyway? I liked the way he behaved, and his playing was so nice."

Douglas could not hear what the man said in reply, though he longed to know. It gave him a degree of comfort, however, to feel that all did not blame him for the disturbance at the hall. He knew how necessary it was to win the good will of the people in general if he expected to work among them in the future.

For some time he sat there, and then continued on his way. He had just reached the foot of the hill when he saw some one coming toward him. Soon he was able to recognise the form of Joe Benton, the shoemaker.

"You are out late to-night," Douglas accosted. "You seem to be in a great hurry. Is anything wrong?"

Joe came up close and looked keenly into the young man's face

"Oh, it's you, is it?" he panted. "Have you seen anything of my lass?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"No?" There was something so pathetic about the way that single word was uttered, that Douglas' heart ached for the old man.

"When did she leave home?" he asked.

"Just after supper."

"Oh, she'll come back all right, never fear."

"Ah, but Jean's so changed," and Joe clutched Douglas by the arm. "She's not what she used to be. Before she went to the city I had no fear about her not coming home in proper time. But now it is different. There's something troubling the lass, and I believe her mind is affected. Oh, it is terrible!"

"Has she told you anything?"

"No, not a word. It's not like Jean. She used to tell us everything. She was a child then; but now—Lord have mercy upon her!",

As Douglas stood there watching the heart-broken old man, a sudden idea flashed into his mind. Had he really seen Jean? Was it her face he had beheld at the hall door? Yes, he felt almost certain that it was she, the same woman he had rescued from the water of the harbour. But what should he do? Dare he tell Joe

all about it, and how Ben Stubbles had tried to destroy her?

As he thought over these things, the shoemaker was standing looking out over the fields. Only by the light of the moon could Douglas see his face, and he noticed that it was very haggard. But he could not see the fire of anger which was kindling in his eyes. Only when the bent form straightened itself with a jerk, and a tense arm was thrust out, did he fully realise the greatness of his emotion.

"My Jean is not to blame," he cried. "She is as innocent as a child. Some villain has injured her, and I must find him. And when I do——"

"You will forgive him," Douglas added, as Joe paused for lack of suitable words to express his wrath.

"Forgive him! Why should I forgive a man who has ruined my lass?"

"Because you are so bidden by the Great Master."

Joe looked quickly up into his companion's face, and his body somewhat relaxed.

"But did he ever suffer like this?" he questioned.

"Surely you know what he endured."

"Ay, ay, I have read it all. But look, I could bear all that easier than this. I could stand to have my body torn to pieces bit by bit rather than see my darling child, my baby, injured. Was His suffering anything like mine?"

"'God so loved the world that he gave his only Begotten Son,'" Douglas quoted. "Have you forgotten what He said?"

Joe made no reply. A great struggle was going on in his heart between right and wrong, and Douglas pitied him. Just then the sound of some one hurrying across

the field diverted their attention. In a moment Empty had leaped the fence and stopped suddenly before them. He was startled to see the two men standing there, and peered intently into their faces.

"Gee!" he exclaimed. "Ye nearly jolted me to sliv-ers."

"Empty, have you seen my Jean?" Joe eagerly enquired.

"Sure. She's out on the hills. I was jist hustlin' to tell ye."

"On the hills!" Joe repeated. "What is she doing out there?"

"Search me! I don't know what she's doin' there, an' I guess she doesn't."

"W-what do you mean?" There was an anxious note in the old man's voice.

"Well, she's been wanderin' round there fer some time now, talkin' to herself strange like, an' singin'. She gives me the shivers, that's what she does. It ain't nat'ral fer Jean to be actin' that way. Ye'd better come an' see fer yerself."

Silently the two men followed Empty across the field, and up the side of a hill. At the top was a fence, and as they came to this, Empty paused and peered cautiously through the rails, and held up a warning finger.

"S-s-h," he whispered. "There she is now. Ye kin jist see her. She's comin' this way. Listen; she's singin'!"

This hill had been used as a sheep pasture for many years. It was a desolate place, devoid of trees, and full of stones. Looking across this barren waste, Douglas was soon able to detect the form of a woman sil-

houetted against the sky. Yes, she was singing, and he was able to recognise the words:

"Truer love can never be;
Will ye no come back to me?"

Joe could now restrain himself no longer. With the cry of "Jean! Jean!" he scrambled over the fence, and made straight for the advancing woman. Empty was about to follow, when Douglas laid a firm hand upon his arm and drew him back.

"Don't go yet," he ordered. "It's better for us to keep out of sight for a while. Her father can do more than we can, and our presence might frighten her."

Joe's cry had startled Jean and she stopped singing. Seeing him coming toward her, she stood for a few seconds watching him. Then she turned and fled along the path she had recently travelled, and disappeared among the rocks.

Then it was that Douglas leaped over the fence and hastened forward, with Empty close at his heels. For a few minutes he was guided by Joe's voice as he called to his daughter. Then all was silent, and though he and Empty searched long and patiently, they could not find the missing ones.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" Empty ejaculated, as he sat down upon a rock to rest. "I can't make out what has happened to 'em. Guess it's not much use huntin' any more. We'd better go home now an' git somethin' to eat. I'm most starved."

Douglas realised that it would be useless to search any longer just then. He would go with Empty, wait at

his place until daybreak, and then return if Joe did not reappear.

The house to which Empty led him was a humble one. A woman was standing at the door as they approached.

"Where's Jean?" she enquired.

"Don't know," Empty replied. "She's out on the hills somewheres."

"What, ye didn't leave the poor girl there all alone, did ye?"

"Oh, her dad's with her, an' I guess he'll round her up all right. I'm most starved, ma. Got anything good?"

Mrs. Dempster was a bright, active, talkative little body, and she bade Douglas a hearty welcome.

"So ye'r the great wrestler, are ye?" she asked, as she offered her visitor a chair, and then hustled about to get some food. "Empty has told me all about ye, an' how ye defended him aginst Jake. It was mighty good of ye, an' sez I to Empty, sez I, 'bring that man home with ye some time, so I kin thank him fer his kindness to a poor fatherless boy.'"

"I didn't do much, I assure you," Douglas replied. "I don't believe Jake would have hurt him."

"No, Jake wouldn't really mean to hurt him, that's true. But ye see, he's so big an' strong that what he might think was a little love tap alongside of the head would knock an ox down. He doesn't intend to hurt. But when Si Stubbles hits, he means it, an' so does Ben. My, I'm mighty glad ye did up that skunk tonight. He deserved it all right."

"So you've heard about that already?" Douglas asked in surprise.

Mrs. Dempster poured a cup of hot tea, brought forth

a plate of frosted doughnuts, and bade Douglas "draw up an' have a bite." When her visitor had been served, she sat down on a chair by the side of the table.

"Ye seem surprised that I know about that racket at the hall," she began. "Empty was watchin' at the door, an' saw it all. He was hustlin' home by the short-cut across the hills to tell me the news when he heard Jean singin'. Say, I admire ye'r pluck. But ye must be keerful, sir."

"Why?"

"It's always necessary to be keerful when ye'r dealin' with skunks. Ye jist never know what they're goin' to do next."

"But why do the people put up with such creatures?" Douglas laughingly enquired.

"Because they can't get rid of 'em, that's why. Me an' Empty have always stood on our indignity, an' it's a mighty good stool to stand on. We don't have to depend on the Stubbles fer a livin'. We have our little farm, our cow, pig, an' hens. Empty ketches enough fish to do us, an' he always gits a deer or two in the fall, an' that is all the meat we want. We pick an' sell a good many berries, an' what eggs an' butter we kin spare. Mark my words, there's somethin' wrong with a place when all the people have to bow down to any one man, 'specially when it's a critter like Si Stubbles. I git terribly irrigated when I think of the way that man is allowed to rule this parish."

"He rules in Church matters, too, I understand," Douglas remarked.

"Ye've hit the nail right on the head, sir. It was him that druv our last two parsons out of the parish an' almost out of their minds, too."

"Did all side with Mr. Stubbles?"

"Oh, no, not all. There were a few who stood at his back, sich as the Bentons, an' me an' Empty. Nellie Strong, God bless her, an' Nan, her sister, didn't go agin 'em, but they were in a difficult persition with that cranky father of theirs."

"Would Church matters have gone on smoothly but for the Stubbles?" Douglas asked.

"They always did before Si an' his brood came to this place. Even supposin' the parsons weren't up to the mark, we would have got along all right. Country people, as a rule, are not hard to please, an' will put up with most anythin'."

There were many questions Douglas wished to ask this entertaining woman, but just then a noise was heard outside, and at once the door was pushed open and the shoe-maker entered. His hat was gone, his clothes were torn, and his hands and face were bleeding. He stood near the door trembling in every limb, and looking appealingly into the faces of those before him.

"Fer the love of heavens, Joe! what's the matter with ye?" Mrs. Dempster exclaimed, as she rose to her feet and gave the old man her chair. "Have ye been fightin'?"

Joe's lips moved, but a groan was the only sound he uttered, as he crouched there, the picture of abject misery.

"Where's Jean?" Mrs. Dempster demanded, laying her right hand kindly upon his shoulder.

"Gone! Gone!" was the low despairing reply.

"Couldn't ye find her?"

"See," and the old man pointed to his torn clothes and bleeding hands. "I followed her over the rocks

and through the bushes. I was too slow and fell so often that she got away. Oh, my Jean, my little lass! She doesn't know her father any more; she wouldn't listen to his voice calling to her."

"You poor man," and Mrs. Dempster wiped her eyes with the corner of her apron. "You are tired out, and must have a cup of tea an' somethin' to eat. Then you must go right home an' git some rest. Me an' Empty will find Jean as soon as it gits light. The dear child, she used to come here so often, an' her an' Empty were great playmates."

The rest and the food strengthened the weary man, and Mrs. Dempster's hearty manner cheered him. When he at length arose to go, Douglas offered to accompany him, and together the two passed out into the morning air.

CHAPTER XIII

NOTICE TO QUIT

THE shoe-maker was very tired, and he leaned heavily on the arm of his companion all the way up the road. He did not speak, and Douglas made no effort to start a conversation. Reaching home, Joe opened the door of his shop and entered. Douglas was about to bid him good-bye when the old man asked him to come in for a few minutes. Lighting a candle, Joe held it carefully before the picture of the Good Shepherd.

"I'm puzzled to-night," he began. "I never thought of it before."

"What is it?" Douglas questioned.

"You see that lamb?"

"Yes."

"It's in danger, isn't it?"

"It certainly is."

"And it wants to be helped, and saved? See how its head is raised, and it seems so glad that the Shepherd has come to rescue it."

"Is there anything puzzling about that?"

"Ah, but suppose that lamb didn't want to be helped, and held back, no matter how hard the Shepherd pleaded, what then?"

"He was strong enough to lift it up bodily and carry it back to the fold, was He not?"

"Ay, ay, I have no doubt about His strength. But I don't believe He would have done it. He would not have saved it against its will. He didn't want a rebellious lamb in His fold."

Joe lowered the candle and placed it upon a shelf. Then he looked intently into his companion's face.

"Jean doesn't want to come back," he whispered. "She's not like that lamb," and he jerked his thumb toward the picture.

"Perhaps she will change her mind," Douglas suggested.

"Do you think so?" was the eager question.

"Let us hope so, at any rate. But, come, you are worn out, and must get some sleep. Trust your trouble to the Good Shepherd. He will find some way to bring back your wandering lamb."

Douglas walked swiftly home, and obtained a little sleep before the work of the day began.

"Ye should have stayed in bed longer," Jake greeted, as he joined him at the barn.

"That's not my habit when there's work to be done," Douglas replied.

"But ye did an extry piece of work last night, though. Great punkins! how I'd like to 'ave been there."

"So you have heard about it already, eh?"

"Sure; couldn't keep a thing like that a secret fer two hours in this place. Sandy Morgan, on his way to the wharf, stopped to tell me about it. Ho, ho, it was great."

Jake continued his milking, and when he was through, he came to where Douglas was sitting.

"I've been thinkin'," he began, "an' feel a bit uneasy about ye."

"In what way?" Douglas questioned, looking up from his milking.

"I'm uneasy about what Si will do. He'll hear only one side of the story from Ben an' the gals, an' they'll paint it as black as they kin, mark my word."

"I'm not afraid of the whole gang," Douglas replied. "What can they do to me?"

"I don't know," and Jake scratched his head in perplexity. "But I advise ye to be keerful. Si's an ugly brute when he gits his dander up, an' it's ginerally up most of the time."

Douglas was not left long in doubt as to what action Simon Stubbles would take. He was working with Jake that morning in the field back of the barn when a man approached. He carried a letter which he at once handed to Douglas.

"The boss wants an answer," he informed him. "He's in a big hurry about it, too."

Opening the letter, Douglas read the brief note, and as he did so an amused expression overspread his face. He studied it carefully for a few minutes without making any comment. Shoving it into his pocket, he was about to resume his work when the messenger stopped him.

"I want ye'r answer," he said.

"Tell your master that I shall answer him the first time I meet him," Douglas replied.

"But Si will give me hell if I don't take more than that," the man whined. "He told me to bring him a 'yes' or a 'no'."

"I can't help that. If you're willing to allow Si

Stubbles to treat you like a dog, you must put up with the consequences."

Douglas stood and watched the messenger as he slowly ambled back across the field.

"Poor wretch," he remarked, "he is afraid to go back to his master. Who is he, anyway?"

"Oh, he's only Barney Tompkins," Jake replied. "He's a useless feller, with a big family. He does odd jobs fer Si, runnin' errands, sweepin' the store, an' sich like. He's got no spunk."

"Like many more in this parish, if I'm not mistaken. Si doesn't want any one here who shows the least sign of spunk. He's given me notice to quit already."

"Great punkins! ye don't say so!"

"Yes, listen to this," and Douglas drew forth the letter from his pocket and began to read:

"JOHN HANDYMAN,

Sir:—You have made yourself very objectionable in this place, so your presence is not wanted here any longer. I, therefore, give you notice to quit at once. This is a fair warning, and, unless you are altogether a fool, you will heed it.

"SIMON STUBBLES."

It took Jake a few seconds to grasp the full purport of these words. When he did at last comprehend their meaning, his face darkened and he stepped over to where Douglas was standing.

"Did Si Stubbles write them words?" he demanded.

"Yes, look for yourself," and Douglas handed him the letter.

Slowly and with difficulty Jake read it through. Douglas watched him with considerable interest.

"Well, what do you think of it?" he asked. "Are you not afraid of losing your help?"

"Damn Si Stubbles!" Jake roared. It was only when wrought up to the highest pitch of fury that Jake swore, and then it was well for his enemies to beware of him. "No, I'm not afraid of losin' ye, an' Si Stubbles ain't the man wot kin drive ye away, either. You jist stay where ye are."

"I intend to," Douglas calmly replied. "But let us get on with our work."

Though outwardly calm, the letter he had received rankled in his heart. The idea that one man could rule a whole community was abhorrent and unnatural. He had no intention of leaving, and he was determined to meet Simon Stubbles and have it out with him face to face. Suppose he should be driven from the parish, how could he ever come back again? How could he return as rector to be the contempt and laughing-stock of all? No, he would oppose Stubbles to the bitter end. The worst they could do would be to kill him, and he was not afraid to die if necessary.

It was near evening and they were hauling in the last load of hay from the field near the road, when an auto, bearing several men, sped past.

"It's Ben bringin' the delegation from the station," Jake explained, as he watched the rapidly disappearing car.

"What delegation?" Douglas queried.

"Why, didn't I tell ye?" Jake asked in surprise. "Well, I clean fergot all about it. There's to be a

big Church meetin' to-night in the hall. Si got word an' he sent notice all around."

"What is the meeting about?" Douglas enquired.

"It has something to do with the new parson who is comin', so I understand."

"So you are to get another clergyman, are you?" Douglas asked as indifferently as possible.

"Seems so. The Bishop has a man all ready, who will be here in a few weeks. I pity the poor feller, I really do, though I can't say I'm much set on parsons since our experience with the last ones."

"You think he will have a hard time of it, eh?"

"He's sure to, an' unless he's somethin' out of the ordinary, he'll be in the same fix as the others. He'll be bound to buck up agin Si sooner or later, an' then there'll be trouble."

Douglas was greatly interested in what he had just heard, and he made up his mind to attend the meeting, tired though he was. He wished to hear and see for himself and not depend upon second-hand information. The meeting was to be public, so he had a perfect right to go.

When the chores were finished, he picked up the paper which had arrived that day from the city. He knew that the meeting would not begin for some time, and the rest would do him good. He glanced first at the big headlines until he reached one which arrested his attention.

"A Well Merited Honor;
Dr. Rannage, Rector of
St. Margaret's Church of This City,
Appointed Archdeacon by his Bishop."

Douglas studied these words very carefully, and then read the long account of the new archdeacon's life, and of the work he had accomplished at St. Margaret's! The article was most laudatory, and spoke of his ability as a preacher, an organiser, and a public-spirited citizen. It referred to Dr. Rannage as a hard worker, who visited his people, rich and poor, in season and out of season, doing all he could for their temporal and spiritual welfare.

With an exclamation of impatience and disgust, Douglas threw aside the paper and left the house. He knew that most of the statements contained in what he had just read were false. The honor was not "well-merited," but had been bestowed simply because Dr. Rannage was rector of St. Margaret's and a special friend of the Bishop. He smiled at the thought of his visiting "his people, rich and poor alike, in season and out of season." He knew for a certainty that Dr. Rannage called only upon a few of the influential members of his flock, and left his curate to look after the "temporal and spiritual welfare" of all the rest. He tried to picture Dr. Rannage in such a parish as Rixton, living on a small salary, and trying to keep the Church life strong and healthy, at the same time combating the opposing influence of the Stubbles. And suppose he succeeded, by doing an herculean work, would he be rewarded in the same manner as if he were rector of St. Margaret's? He smiled grimly at the mere suggestion of the idea. Whoever heard of a poor country parson being singled out for such an honor, no matter how much he might merit it?

Douglas was walking slowly down the road as he thought over these things. Several people drove past

on their way to the hall, and he saw a number of men walking on ahead. The sun was just lingering on the far-off horizon, and he was quite sure the meeting would not begin for half an hour at least. The delegates had not gone by yet, and so it was not necessary for him to hurry.

Coming to the road leading to Mrs. Dempster's, he looked at the little house over in the field, and wondered if Jean had been found. His notice to quit, the news of the Church meeting, and the announcement of Dr. Rannage's elevation had so occupied his attention that he had little time to think over the events of the past night. But now he thought of the heart-broken shoemaker, and a desire came upon him to know if anything had been heard of the wayward daughter.

CHAPTER XIV

SETTLING THINGS

THE hall at the Corner presented a far different appearance from the previous evening. There was a large attendance, for much interest was aroused over the announcement that a new clergyman was to come to the parish. As Douglas slipped into a back seat with several others who were somewhat late, he glanced toward the platform, and great was his astonishment to see Dr. Rannage, the new archdeacon, sitting there. A sudden fear seized him that he might be recognised, and his plans spoiled. He was glad that he was so far back where the light was dim, and that he would hardly be noticed from the platform.

Simon Stubbles was chairman, and he had called the meeting to order before Douglas arrived. He was making a few opening remarks, and was in an excellent frame of mind, and inclined to be somewhat jocular. He realised the importance of having an archdeacon present, and referred to it several times. To Douglas, he seemed most ridiculous as he stood there endeavouring to be as pompous as possible that all might be properly impressed.

"I have been greatly concerned about the spiritual welfare of this parish," he was saying. "It is really a disaster that we have had no rector for a long time. It is, therefore, with great satisfaction that news has

reached us that the Bishop is to send us a clergyman in a few weeks. We all trust that he will be a suitable man and fall into the ways of the people here. So much depends upon that, and I feel sure that the Bishop has had an eye to our needs. He knows this parish, and in the goodness of his heart he has sent this notable delegation to meet us and discuss Church affairs. It is not the first time that I have had the pleasure of meeting Dr. Rannage, who has recently been honored, and rightly so, by the Bishop. I know you are eagerly waiting to hear what he has to say about the parson who is coming to us. I have much pleasure in introducing to you the first speaker of the evening, the Venerable Archdeacon Rannage of St. Margaret's Church."

Dr. Rannage rose slowly to his feet and stood before the assembled people. Physically, he was an impressive looking man, especially so with his long black clerical coat, and official gaiters. If only a different head adorned his well-built body, everything would have been in proportion. But as Douglas studied him, he noted what a weak chin he possessed, how the bump of conceit was largely developed, and how low and receding his forehead, over which a thin crop of hair was carefully parted in the middle. But he had the gift of speech, and if he merely said "Two and two are four" it was uttered in such a manner as to seem like a great piece of news, and made people wonder at the knowledge of the man.

"Dear friends," he began, looking impressively around the hall, "I feel that I am no stranger to most of you here. Some of you, no doubt, have been at St. Margaret's, and have seen or met me there. But if not, I feel that we are now well acquainted after your

worthy chairman's introductory remarks. And let me say ere I go further, how gratified I am to have Mr. Stubbles here to-night, and to find him so interested in the affairs of the Church in this parish. It is so encouraging to meet a man of Mr. Stubbles' ability and influence ready and willing to abandon for a time his heavy business cares, and devote himself so heartily to the welfare of the community in which he is living. If all will follow his excellent example, I feel quite confident that the Church work in this parish will be greatly blest.

"Before I give you my brief message to-night, permit me to say that I wish this meeting to be very informal. Do not mind stopping me to ask any question which may occur to you, for in that way we shall be able to understand one another better."

Here Dr. Rannage paused, and slowly lifted a glass of water to his lips, after which he produced a large silk handkerchief and deliberately wiped his mouth. When the handkerchief had been carefully stowed away in the tail of his long coat, he once more looked over the audience.

"We bear to-night a message from your Bishop," he continued. "'In the goodness of his heart,' as your chairman so neatly put it, he thought it good to send us here that we might meet with you, and discuss parochial affairs. He has already chosen a man well-fitted, we all believe, for the work here."

"When will he come?" some one asked.

"That I cannot definitely say. He has been working hard for the last two years, and is now taking his vacation. In a few weeks, I trust, he will be with you."

"Is he married?" came the question from the right.

"No. He has been so devoted to his work that he has not given much thought to matrimony, so far as I know. But if all the maidens in this parish are as captivating as the two I met this afternoon at The Castle" (here he turned and bowed to the chairman) "he will find it difficult to choose who is the fairest, if he should decide to take to himself a wife."

Douglas almost emitted an audible groan at the thought of the "two captivating maidens at The Castle." A mental picture rose before him of their thin faces, turned-up noses, and prominent teeth, with their sharp sarcastic tongues as an additional horror.

"It's lucky he's not married," the man who asked the last question remarked.

"Why?" Dr. Rannage quickly challenged. "Have you a daughter of your own to enter the contest?"

"No sir-ree," was the emphatic reply, when the laughter which followed the archdeacon's sally had subsided. "I've got all boys, thank goodness, an' am not interested that way. But as the new parson is not married, we won't have to bother fixin' up the rectory. It's in a bad shape now, an' it will take a lot to have it repaired."

"The rectory is certainly in a disgraceful condition," Dr. Rannage assented, "as I saw myself this afternoon. Now, I wish to appeal to all here to get it repaired as soon as possible. The longer it is neglected, the more expensive it will be, and your new rector may wish to live in it and have a suitable housekeeper to look after his welfare."

"Let him board," some one suggested. "That'll be the best way, an' we can fix up the rectory when he

wants to get married. If he takes all right here, there'll be no trouble about raisin' the money."

"Now since you have mentioned money," Dr. Rannage smilingly replied, "it is just as well to consider that important matter first as last. You are all aware that this parish is asked to make up a certain amount toward your clergyman's salary, and the Board of Missions will pay the balance. Do you remember how much you raised in the past?" he asked, turning to the chairman.

"Four hundred dollars," Stubbles replied. "But it was too much. This is a poor parish, sir, and I told the Bishop so the last time I saw him."

"Well, he asked me to find out if you would endeavour to raise that amount, and perhaps a little more. It always pleases him so much when he finds that people are trying to take the burden off the city churches and becoming more and more self-supporting. Now, do you not think you could raise four hundred and fifty dollars for the first year?"

"A great deal depends upon the new parson," Stubbles emphatically replied. "If he takes well there will be little trouble, but if not, we might as well give up at once. We know that from bitter experience in the past."

"Hear, hear," several called out. "You're right, sir."

"Is the new man a good speaker?" came the query. "Much hangs on that."

Douglas leaned suddenly forward now, and awaited the answer with considerable interest. He noted that Dr. Rannage hesitated and seemed to be groping for a

suitable reply. That in itself was ominous and affected the gathering.

"You see," he began, "I have had little opportunity of hearing this young man. Although he has been my curate for the past two years, he has spoken but a few times at St. Margaret's. The people there are extremely particular and decidedly intellectual, and so prefer to listen to their rector."

It was with considerable difficulty that Douglas repressed a chuckle at these words. He knew very well how jealous Dr. Rannage was of his own ability as a speaker, and he had always taken it for granted that the members of St. Margaret's would rather hear him than any one else, especially a curate. He knew something, too, about his views of country people, as he had heard him speak about them in no flattering manner on several occasions. To him they were a heavy, ignorant lot, unrefined, and only a step removed from the beasts of the field. He had expected at the outset of his address that he would say something which would arouse the anger of the people of Rixton, and so was not surprised at his tactless remarks. He noted the feeling of indignation which was pervading the room, and the whispered conversations which were going on.

"So the new parson was pitched out of St. Margaret's, was he?" a man questioned.

"Oh, no, not 'pitched out,'" Dr. Rannage explained. "He left of his own accord."

"Why?" the same voice asked. "Couldn't he stand up to the job?"

"Not exactly. He was a hard worker, but he found it almost impossible to understand the ways, ah, how shall I put it? of refined society. That is, he could not

mingle freely with the social element which is so prominent at St. Margaret's. He preferred the lower life, such as is found along the water-front, and in the poorer sections of the city. He was more at home there."

"I am afraid, sir, that the new parson will not suit here," the chairman announced. "According to your words, he is not a gentleman, and does not understand the ways of polite society. Now, we want a man all can respect, who understands his people, and yet who has the true ring of a natural born gentleman."

"Who is he, anyway?" a man asked. "Where did he come from?"

"He was brought up on a farm, and worked his way through college," Dr. Rannage explained. "He understands country ways and should suit very nicely here."

"Why don't ye say 'the bush'?" Bill Simmonds shouted. "Anything will suit us here."

The laugh which followed this remark annoyed Dr. Rannage.

"I am almost inclined to believe you are right," he angrily retorted.

"Ye believe it already, an' we know it."

"Order!" the chairman sternly demanded. "Bill Simmonds, you had better leave the hall, if you can't behave yourself."

"All right, sir," Bill acquiesced, as he threw a wink to a man across the aisle and settled back in his seat. "I've got nuthin' more to say."

Dr. Rannage was evidently embarrassed. He mopped his face with his handkerchief, and took another drink of water.

"I think I have explained matters quite fully," he at last continued, "and perhaps my companions here

would like to say something. I trust, however, that you will give your new clergyman a fair trial, and do everything in your power to help him."

"What's his name?" Tom Stephens asked. "You have never mentioned that."

"It is Douglas Stanton. He comes from a good old family, so I understand, and his grandfather held an important government position in this province."

Dr. Rannage's companions had very little to say. They were business men, so they said, and unaccustomed to public speaking. Each made an appeal to the people to support the new clergyman, to repair the rectory, and to give more liberally toward the support of the Church in their parish. They were given an attentive hearing, and when they were through, the chairman brought the meeting to a sudden close. Just why he did so Douglas could not understand. Stubbles' manner had greatly changed since his opening remarks and he seemed to be annoyed and irritable.

Douglas was the first to leave the building, and he stood outside in the shadow of the hall hoping to get a word with Stubbles. As the people passed him, he overheard some of their remarks which were by no means complimentary.

"He made a mess of it, he surely did," a man was saying. "What does he know about the country?"

"Nuthin'," his companion replied. "What were them funny things he wore on his legs? I would like to see him out in the——"

Douglas could not hear his closing words. But the comments of others were of a similar nature, and he realised that Dr. Rannage had not smoothed the way for his coming to the parish as rector.

Last of all came the delegates, talking earnestly with one another. He could not hear what they were saying, but judging from the tone of their voices, they were not at all satisfied at the outcome of the meeting.

Simon Stubbles walked behind. He was limping and carried a cane in his hand. His head was bent, and his face was turned to the ground as if in deep thought. Douglas at once stepped forward and touched him on the arm. Stubbles gave a sudden start and looked quickly around.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" he gasped. He did not altogether relish the idea of meeting the man he had ordered from the parish.

"Yes, that's who it is," Douglas replied. "I want to have a word with you."

"Didn't you receive my message?" Stubbles asked.

"I did, and I want an explanation."

"There's nothing to explain. You have made yourself very obnoxious here, and you must get out."

"And suppose I do not obey?"

"Then you will have to put up with the consequences."

"That is a pretty serious threat. This is a free country, and if anything should happen to me, what then? You might find yourself in an awkward position."

"Oh, I'm not worrying about that. All I ask you to do is to leave this place at once. You've had fair warning, and I haven't time to argue with you any longer."

Stubbles was about to move forward, when Douglas blocked his way.

"Just stay where you are," the latter ordered. "If

you make any outcry, you'll regret it. But I won't hurt you if you keep quiet. Now listen to me, Simon Stubbles. You have lorded it over the people in this parish too long for their welfare. It is through you that the Church life is dormant here, and no clergyman can stay for any length of time. You know this to be true, notwithstanding your canting words in the hall to-night. I am not afraid of you, and I shall remain in this parish as long as I please. If you interfere with me in any way it will be at your own peril. I have given you timely warning, and you may go."

Simon Stubbles listened to these plain words in amazement. He had never been thus spoken to before, and his anger was intense. He began to stamp, rage and denounce the man who dared to speak to him in such an audacious manner. He attracted the attention of those waiting for him in the car some distance off. Seeing that two men were approaching to learn what was the matter, Douglas leaped aside and disappeared among the trees surrounding the hall.

CHAPTER XV

A WET DAY

DOUGLAS was very tired and slept soundly that night. When he awoke next morning the rain was beating down upon the roof over his head. It sounded like music to his ears, for it would mean rest that day from the toil of the field. There were several things he wished to do, and the rain was just what he needed. There would be no work in the field, so he would be free to go where he wished.

Jake had been at the meeting the night before and was very talkative.

"What happened to ye when the meetin' was over?" he enquired, as they sat down to breakfast.

"Oh, I waited around a while to watch the speakers and the chairman," Douglas replied.

"Did ye ever see a real live archdeacon before?"

"Yes, I have seen several."

"Ye don't tell! Well, that was the first one I ever sot me eyes on one. But, say, what was them things he had on his legs?"

"Gaiters, I think they are called."

"H'm, the same as the Bishop wears, eh? But what are they good fer?"

"They are a sign of his position, I suppose. I really know nothing more about the matter than you do."

"But what's the good of archdeacons, anyway? If they're all like the one we saw last night, I wouldn't give much fer the hull bunch."

"They are supposed to help the Bishop, so I understand."

"Help him, eh? Well, I guess that feller didn't help much in settlin' matters in this parish. Why, he made a mess of the hull affair."

"In what way?"

"Why, don't ye remember how riled he got when he was asked questions? He put his foot in it, too, when he said that a parson would do fer Rixton who had been kicked out of St. Margaret's in the city."

"He didn't really say that."

"No, not exactly in them words, but that was what he meant, an' we all took it that way."

"So you think that the archdeacon made it all the harder for the new clergyman by what he said last night, do you?" Douglas asked.

"Sure," Jake replied, as he helped himself to another pancake. "Didn't ye notice the feelin' in the meetin', an' how Si changed? Why, he looked jist like a thunder cloud about to bust. I sartinly do pity the new parson. He's goin' to have a hard time of it, mark my word."

"I had a little talk with Stubbles after the meeting," Douglas quietly remarked.

"Ye did, eh?" and Jake's eyes glowed with interest. "Was he surprised to see ye?"

"I believe so. He thought I was going to knock him down, and he raved like a madman. But I told him a few straight facts which he is not likely to forget."

"Ye did, eh? Bully fer you! But be careful, John.

Si won't fergit anything, an' he'll come back at ye when ye'r least expectin' him."

"I told him that I am going to stay right in the parish, and that he couldn't drive me out."

"Good for you!" Mrs. Jukes exclaimed. "I like to hear a man talk that way. If the rest in Rixton would do the same Si would be taught a lesson in a short time. But they all lie down and let him walk over them."

"Ye'r always sayin' that, Susie," Jake chided. "Ye ought to know by this time what a grip Si has on everything in this parish."

"Well, it's about time, then, that he lost his grip. If there was only some one with any backbone who would go ahead, the rest would follow all right. People are getting sick and tired of the Stubbles' rule."

"Maybe the new parson'll be that kind of a man," Jake suggested. " 'Spose we wait till he comes."

"H'm," and Mrs. Jukes tossed her head, "a great chance he'll have to go ahead with everybody willing to crawl before Si Stubbles and lick his boots. Why, just as soon as Si snaps his finger all the men dance attendance, and you know it, Jake Jukes. You do the same yourself."

"But maybe the new parson might be able to do something," Jake replied, as he mopped his forehead with a big red handkerchief. He was feeling very hot and uncomfortable before his wife's attack.

"He'll be very different, then, from the last two we had," Mrs. Jukes retorted. "I'm not expecting much from him, judging from the past."

Douglas was considerably amused at this conversation. He wondered what Jake and his wife would say

if they were suddenly told that the "new parson" was before them. He was finding the part he was playing more interesting every day. How it would end, and how he would explain matters, he had not the least idea. He did not worry, however, leaving the future to take care of itself.

That afternoon Douglas paid a visit to Mrs. Dempster. He wished to find out for himself how Jean was getting along, and also to listen to the widow, for he enjoyed hearing her talk, and her comments upon parish affairs.

Mrs. Dempster was cooking in the kitchen, and Jean was lying on a sofa near the stove, to all appearance asleep.

"It's right glad I am to see ye," and Mrs. Dempster placed a chair for her visitor as she spoke. "It's a dull day and not many people stirrin'. Empty's gone to his nets, so me an' Jean have been havin' a quiet time all by ourselves."

"A busy time for you, I see," Douglas replied, glancing toward the table. "Those pies look very tempting."

"Oh, yes, it makes me hustle all right to fill Empty. I often tell him he's well named, fer I never saw any one who eats as much as he does."

"All mothers say the same thing, don't they? Growing lads need plenty of food. It's better to pay the grocer than the doctor, isn't it?"

Mrs. Dempster paused in her work and glanced toward the still form on the sofa.

"I guess she'll need the doctor before long, if I'm not much mistaken," she remarked in a low voice. "Poor child, she's had a hard time of it since she went

to the city. Who'd a thought that bright an' happy Jean Benton would have come to this?"

"Is she very sick, do you think?" Douglas asked as he looked toward the sleeping woman.

Mrs. Dempster did not at once reply. She placed a pie in the oven, and then turned to her visitor.

"Guess we'd better step outside fer a minute," she suggested. "We kin talk freer in the open air."

"There, that's better," Mrs. Dempster panted as she closed the door behind her. "Ye kin never tell when sleeping people will wake an' make matters uncomfortable. Now, look here, sir, I want ye to do me a favour."

"All right," Douglas assented. "What is it?"

"I want ye to ask Nell to come here as soon as she kin. There's somethin' I want to speak to her about. She's the only woman in the place I care to ask. She's got more sense than all the rest put together, which is sayin' a good deal."

"When do you want her to come?"

"Oh, to-morrow will do. I don't want her to come over to-night, as it's wet an' the roads are so muddy. Jist tell her to come when she gits time."

"So you think Jean is sick?"

"Yes, very. But she'll be sicker before she gits better, poor dear. But there, I must git back to my work. It was good of ye to come over."

Douglas was only too glad of an excuse to visit the Strongs. It was dark by the time he reached the house, as he had been delayed owing to the cattle going astray from the pasture. The door was opened by Nan, who gave a cry of delight when she saw Douglas standing before her.

"My, you have been a long time coming to see us again," she chided. "I have been watching for you every day."

It was a pleasant home-like scene which met Douglas' eyes as he entered the little sitting-room. The professor was seated in his big chair by the side of the table. Nell was sitting opposite, peeling and coreing apples. Nan had been reading to her father, and the book was lying open on the table where she had hurriedly left it upon the arrival of the visitor. Douglas received a cordial welcome from Nell and the professor.

"I hope I am not interrupting your quietness," he apologised, as he sat down near the old man.

"I'm very glad you have interrupted the quietness," Nan quickly replied. "I'm sick and tired of Shakespeare. He's getting on my nerves."

"Nan, Nan, you must not talk of the master in that way," her father chided.

"I thought that you did the reading," Douglas remarked, turning to Nell.

"So I do, as a rule," was the smiling reply. "But Nan doesn't like peeling apples, and so she preferred to read."

"Ugh! apples stain my fingers and make them feel horrid," Nan exclaimed in disgust. "I would rather read anything—even Shakespeare."

"How is your work getting on, sir?" Douglas enquired, turning toward the professor.

"Slowly, very slowly, these days," was the reply. "There are several points I wish to think out carefully before I put them in writing. But we can talk about such matters again. I am eager now to hear

about the Church meeting which was held last night. I suppose you were there?"

"Oh, yes, I wished to see and hear the new archdeacon, Dr. Rannage."

"What, was he there?"

"Yes, and two other delegates with him."

"Tell me about the meeting, please," and the professor leaned back comfortably in his chair.

As briefly as possible Douglas narrated the events of the meeting. He glanced occasionally at Nell, and noticed that at times she ceased her work to listen.

"So nothing was accomplished, then?" the professor queried when Douglas finished.

"Nothing that I could see, except to make it all the harder for the new clergyman who is coming here."

"Oh, he'll find it hard enough, all right, trust Si Stubbles for that. If he's anything like the last clergyman we had, he'll soon give in. I'm afraid that he will be a man of straw when it is a man of iron we need."

Douglas smiled to himself. He was enjoying the various comments he was hearing about himself, and he wondered what the professor and others would think if they knew who he really was.

"A clergyman is supposed to be a 'steward of the mysteries,'" the old man continued. "Now, when I think of those words, I always picture to myself a mother standing before a cupboard with a bunch of keys in her hand. By her side are several children watching her with intense interest, waiting for her to open the door and bring forth things which are old, such as nicely-frosted doughnuts, and things which are new, such as jelly and pie. That cupboard is a place

of mystery to the children, and the mother has the key to the treasure: Do you follow me?"

"Certainly," Douglas replied.

"Well, then, that cupboard is the Bible; the clergyman is the steward who is supposed to have the key, and his people are the children. They are looking to him to bring forth the things new and old for their good. But as far as I can find, he generally brings forth the same old things Sunday after Sunday which have become so stale that people do not care for them."

"Do all do that?" Douglas asked, mentally going over several of his sermons.

"Oh, no, not all. But the sermons I have heard since coming to this parish, and others which have been reported to me, have been of that kind. There was no life, nothing personal, and not one new and striking thought upon any great subject. They were just the same old platitudes about the Fathers, the doctrine of the Church, the duty of people to attend the services, and to give. There has been no food for longing, hungry souls."

"Such teaching is necessary, is it not?" Douglas queried.

"I do not deny that at all. But it is poor food to satisfy the soul, especially when it is served at every meal. The trouble is that so many young men leave college with stereotyped ideas. They are parrots and repeat what they have been taught, and nothing else."

Douglas winced a little at these words, for he knew how well they applied to himself. But he was beginning to see life in a new light since he had become plain John Handyman.

"We need a man who has seen and experienced life,"

the professor continued, "and can convert the great thoughts of the Bible into living food for hungry, troubled and tempted souls. I wish every clergyman would take a page from the life of the little bee. People as a rule think that it gets the honey right from the flower. They are mistaken. All it gets is a little sweet water. But it takes that water, retires, adds something to it from itself, and by a process of its own makes it into honey."

"Isn't that funny!" Nan exclaimed. "Why I always thought the bees carried the honey on their legs and scraped it off when they got home. Didn't you think so, Nell?"

"I confess I did," was the laughing reply. "It shows us that we have much to learn about the common things around us."

"Well, what the bee does, so should the teacher of the Word," the professor resumed. "He should go to the Bible as the bee to the flower, and 'read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest.' Thus, through a process of his own, he is to bring forth the real spiritual honey for the benefit of hungry souls."

"Daddy, let's talk about something else," Nan suggested. "I am tired of such deep subjects. I was promised that I could talk to Mr. Handyman the next time he came, and there are so many things I want to ask him."

Douglas glanced at the clock and was surprised to find that it was nearly nine. He rose at once to his feet.

"I must go now," he remarked. "It would not do for me to keep you up late."

"That's always the way," Nan pouted.

"Next time I come we shall have a long talk," Douglas promised.

Nell showed Douglas to the door. He was glad of this, as it gave him an opportunity to deliver Mrs. Dempster's message.

"Is Jean very ill?" Nell asked.

"I am afraid so."

"Well, I shall go over to-morrow. Poor girl, she has had a hard time of it. Her face was so white at the hall door. She startled me. And, oh, Mr. Handyman, I want to thank you for the stand you took that night."

"You don't blame me, then?"

"Blame you! Why, no."

"I am thankful for that. It shows that all are not against me."

"Only the Stubbles condemn you. They are very angry."

Nell paused suddenly, as if in deep thought.

"Are you going right home?" she presently asked.

"Yes."

"Would you mind taking something for Jake? It is a pick-handle which we brought from the wharf last night in our boat. We often bring things for him and he does the same for us. It is a new one, and he may need it. It is right there on the verandah."

Douglas found the stick and placed it over his shoulder, bade Nell good-night, and plunged forth into the darkness.

CHAPTER XVI

TWIN FIRES

DOUGLAS walked slowly toward the main highway, lost in thought. He was much interested in the professor's comments about clergymen. He knew it was a good tonic to hear such plain statements. But he thought mostly about Nell. He had watched her during the time he had been at the house and was more deeply impressed than ever. She was so quiet and reserved. She had never seemed so beautiful as she sat by the table with the light from the shaded lamp falling upon her face. He thought about Ben, and a feeling of anger smote his heart. What right had such a cad to have any claim over such a woman as that? he asked himself. And how could she see anything in Ben to admire? Had they met near the old tree since the night of the dance? he wondered.

Douglas was startled from his musings by a sudden noise to his left. Then, in an instant, the forms of two men hurled themselves upon him. A blow from a stick grazed his head and made him dizzy for a second. In the twinkling of an eye he realised that this was some of Ben Stubbles' mean, dirty work, and the thought maddened him. With the pick-handle he struck vigorously out, and soon had the satisfaction of know-

ing that he had settled one of his assailants, by the mournful groans he heard. Only one man was now left to deal with, and it did not take long to disarm him. Seeing that he was alone, with his cudgel knocked spinning from his grasp, he started to run away. Douglas, however, sprang after him and managed to seize him by the tail of his coat. To this he held with a bulldog grip while the other struggled frantically to get away. Finding that his efforts were in vain, and that he was in danger of being caught, he slipped out of his coat, leaving it in the hands of his conqueror, and disappeared in the darkness.

"Come back and get your coat," Douglas shouted. "You might need it before morning."

Receiving no answer, he began to grope around for the other assailant. But no sign of him could he find. He had evidently been able to get away, and Douglas was thankful that he had not killed him, no matter how much he deserved it.

"Well, that was a surprise party," he muttered. "Luckily for me that Nell gave me that pick-handle." Then a sudden thought struck him. Did she suspect anything? Had she heard rumours as to what Ben might do, and so had given him a weapon of defence? He wondered about this the rest of the way home. In fact, it pleased him to feel that Nell was interested in his welfare.

Having reached his own room, he examined his trophy of victory. It was an old coat, partly covered with mud. He went through the pockets, and what he found in one gave him much satisfaction. It was a piece of paper with a few brief instructions scrawled upon it, as follows:

"Get Keezer and be on hand to-night. Bring your sticks with you. Meet me at the bridge at eight sharp. Ben."

Douglas smiled grimly to himself as he read this brief note. He knew now that Ben had been somewhere around. No doubt he had been peering through the window and watching him talking to the professor and his daughters. How he longed to get a rap at the cowardly cur. The pick-handle would not be necessary; oh, no, his fists would be sufficient. But Ben knew enough to keep out of the way and let others do his dirty work.

Douglas said nothing about the night affair to the Jukes, as he was not in a talkative mood. His head was quite sore where he had been struck, and he wondered about the man who had received the force of the pick-handle. But he could not remain silent long, for Jake was bubbling over with excitement when he returned from the store whither he had gone for a barrel of flour. Dinner was waiting him, and he had no time to speak until he had stabled the horses and washed himself.

"Say, John," he began as soon as he had taken his seat at the table, "what were ye up to last night?"

"So you have been hearing something, have you?" Douglas enquired.

"Sure I have. Why, the hull place is buzzin' with the news, an' Si's as mad as blazes. Guess he's goin' to have ye arrested right off."

"Have me arrested!" Douglas exclaimed in surprise. "Why, what for?"

"Fer waylayin' Billy Keezer an' Tom Oakes last

night, an' breakin' their heads with a stick. They're all used up, an' Tom swears that you stole his coat."

Douglas leaned back in his chair and laughed so heartily that Jake and his wife looked at him in astonishment.

"So Billy and Tom are sick, are they?" he chuckled. "Well, I hope they have learned a lesson and will mind their own affairs after this."

He then told the story of the fight the night before, and when he had finished he went to his room and brought down the captured coat, and read the note he had found in the pocket.

"Great punkins!" Jake exclaimed, as he hit the table with his fist and made the dishes rattle. "I'm mighty glad ye've got that letter. It's sure proof that Ben was back of the hull affair. And so ye knocked 'em both out with the pick-handle, did ye? Bully fer you! I wish ye'd got a tap at Ben while ye was about it."

"Did you see Billy and Tom?" Douglas asked.

"No. They're in bed. The doctor's been to see 'em, so I learned."

"And Si is going to have me arrested, eh?"

"So I heard. He was rampin' around like a lion."

"I wish he would," Douglas quietly remarked. "It would clear the air somewhat, and give me a chance to say something. But Si will never come out in the open like that, mark my word. He and Ben are back of that attack last night, if I'm not greatly mistaken, and they would not dare to face an investigation."

"You're right there," Mrs. Jukes replied. "They'll do nothing now but just wait for another chance. You

had better be careful how you wander around alone at night, especially near the professor's place."

"Why?" Douglas asked, noting the twinkle in her eyes.

"Ben'll be getting jealous, that's all. He'll have another grudge against you, if you're not careful."

Douglas realised that what Mrs. Jukes said was quite true. Ben must have been watching through the window the night he was at the professor's house, and no doubt jealousy had been added to his hatred. But he did not care, for a new feeling had now taken possession of him. His heart burned within him when he thought of Ben meeting Nell and making love to her. He brooded over this all the afternoon as he worked in the field. Nell, with her simplicity and charm of manner, was ever before him. He could not get her out of his mind, and at times he found himself looking across the field in the direction of her home.

Suddenly there came to him the realisation that Nell Strong was the one woman in the whole world he wanted. His heart cried out for her, and the idea of her becoming the wife of Ben Stubbles was almost more than he could endure. For the first time in his life he was in love, and with a beautiful woman, who in some unaccountable manner was bound to a man who was his most bitter enemy. Ben must not have her, he told himself over and over again that afternoon. But what was he to do? He himself was merely a farm-hand in Nell's eyes, and he had not the least reason to believe that she cared anything for him. Ben, on the other hand, was the son of the most influential man in the parish, and had been making love to her for some time.

hand to that rascal, so that ended it. Surely she must know that he was a downright villain. Was she playing a double game? Why had she told him only last night, standing at the door of her house, that she was glad of the part he had taken at the hall? And yet here she was talking to the very man he had opposed, and perhaps enjoying a lovers' chat.

Douglas was sorely puzzled. He knew that he should go home, and yet the two standing near the tree fascinated him. The man seemed to be doing most of the talking, and Nell was plucking at the bark on the tree with nervous fingers, so Douglas thought. He tried to picture the expression on her face and the look in her eyes. He could not associate Nell with anything that was mean and unwomanly. There must be some reason for her presence there with Ben. The thought gave him some comfort, and he breathed a sigh of relief. He must not judge her too harshly until he knew more. Perhaps she was suffering keenly, and would need his assistance. He felt that she was a woman who would greatly endure and remain silent, even though her heart were breaking. He must stand by and do what he could to help her. Even though she might never be his, yet he would be her friend to the last if she would only give him the opportunity.

A slight noise to the left caused Douglas to turn his head, and as he did so he caught a fleeting glimpse of some one moving swiftly yet cautiously among the bushes. It was a woman, and he recognised her at once as Jean Benton. She looked neither to the right nor to the left, but kept her eyes fixed upon the couple standing by the old tree. She leaned forward as she walked and seemed to Douglas like a panther stealing

upon its prey. He could not see her face, but from her intensity of action he could easily imagine the passion depicted there, and the fiery gleam in her eyes. A sudden thrill shot through his body as he realised the purpose of her presence. It was mad jealousy, there could be no doubt of it, and the object was Nell. She had alienated her lover's affections, and Jean's passionate nature had been aroused. What would she do? he asked himself. What could not a woman do when crazed with intense fury?

Douglas expected that Jean would spring suddenly from among the bushes and confront Ben and Nell face to face. She did nothing of the kind, however, but stopped when a short distance away, crouched low to the ground, and watched. Douglas remained where he was, spell-bound. There was nothing he could do, and it was not his business to interfere. If he went forward now, it would show that he had been spying. No, he would wait and see what the outcome of it all would be.

He did not have to wait long, for in a few minutes Ben and Nell left the tree and walked slowly along the path leading to the house. And after them crept Jean, keeping well within the deep shadows of the thick bushes. Soon all had disappeared and Douglas was left alone with his thoughts. He did not at once leave the shore, but sat there thinking over what he had just witnessed. Jean was jealous of Nell, and blamed her for stealing her lover. And what of himself? Was he not jealous of Ben? Did he not want that beautiful woman for himself? Yes, there were twin fires burning in their breasts. But, oh, how different were

"And is every one blaming Mr. Handyman?" Nell asked when Nan had finished.

"Oh, yes. And they are saying what a dangerous man he is, and should be driven out of the place. I heard the storekeeper tell another man that he stole Tom Oakes' coat last night, and that he believed that Mr. Handyman is a noted thief."

"Why, how did he get Tom's coat?" Nell asked in surprise.

"No one seemed to know for sure. But people think that he knocked Tom down and took his coat, thinking there might be money in it."

"Where did this happen, Nan?"

"On the main road, according to Billy and Tom. They said that they were walking quietly along when they were set upon by Mr. Handyman, and knocked down with a big stick. I don't believe it, do you?"

But Nell did not answer. She stood in the middle of the room gazing thoughtfully out of the window which faced the main highway.

"Come with me, Nan," she at length ordered. "Let us go for a short walk."

Somewhat surprised, but asking no questions, Nan accompanied her sister out of the house, through the garden and along the road leading to the highway. Nell kept a careful watch on both sides of the road, and when they at last came to the spot where the fight had taken place, she espied two hats lying in the ditch. Near by were two stout cudgels.

"This is where the fight took place," Nell quietly remarked, as she pointed to the hats and the sticks. "They belong to Tom and Billy, if I am not much mistaken."

"But they said it was on the main road where they were attacked," Nan replied.

"Then they must be lying. There is the proof where the fight took place. And why was it here?" she asked.

"I don't know, do you?"

"I think I do. Billy and Tom were lying in wait for Mr. Handyman last night, and attacked him as he was coming from our house."

"Oh, do you think so? What would they do that for?"

"Perhaps they were obeying orders. But we shall find out later. Let us take those hats and sticks and keep them; they may be needed later."

"Oh, I believe I know," Nan exclaimed, now much excited. "They are Si Stubbles' men, and he got them to attack my musician. Wasn't it mean of him! And then to think that Billy and Tom would lie and throw the blame on an innocent man."

Nell was very quiet during the rest of the day. She went about her work as usual, but her mind was upon other things. At times she found herself standing and looking absently out of the window. She felt quite sure who was the man responsible for the trouble the previous night. Her face was paler than it had been for some time and an occasional nervous tremor shook her body. She found herself mentally comparing two men; one, mean and contemptible, with no apparent aim in life but the satisfaction of self; the other, self-reliant, noble, and working for an honest wage. She knew that one was a miserable cad, while the other was a true gentleman.

As evening drew near, she became restless and worked with a feverish haste about the house and at times in

the garden. When supper was over, she drew Nan out upon the verandah.

"Something is going to happen to-night," she told her, "and I wish you would take father to his room and read him to sleep."

"Is it that old tree affair again to-night?" Nan impatiently asked.

"Yes."

"And Ben will be there, I suppose."

"I expect he will."

"Nell, I wish you would tell him once and for all that you will not have anything more to do with him. I hate him, and so do you, and you know it."

"Hush, hush, Nan. Do not talk that way. Do as I ask you now, and perhaps I shall have something to tell you in the morning. You had better go to bed early, too."

Nell seemed to be very calm as she walked slowly to the shore and took up her position by the side of the tree. But her heart was beating rapidly, and her courage almost forsook her. When, however, she saw Ben appear from the bushes, and thought of his contemptible work of the previous evening, she became strengthened by the spirit of anger which suddenly possessed her. He seemed to her more like a serpent than a man, and she drew back a step as he approached too near.

"Surely you're not afraid of me, Nell," he chided, noting her action.

"I am not afraid," she calmly replied, "but I do not wish you to come too close, that's all."

"When are you going to stop this fooling, Nell?" he impetuously asked.

"I am going to stop it to-night, and at once," and she looked him squarely in the eyes as she spoke. "You have your answer."

He mistook her meaning, however, and reached out impulsively to put his arms around her.

"Keep away," she ordered. "Don't touch me."

"Why, what do you mean?" Ben demanded, shrinking back before her steadfast look.

"I mean that I am not going to have anything more to do with you. You can go your way, and I will go mine."

"But I thought you cared for me," the man replied in surprise.

"Haven't I told you over and over again that I did not? But you would persist in coming here, nevertheless."

"Do you mean what you say?" Ben asked, while a surly expression leaped into his eyes.

"Yes, I mean every word. You had better go now, as it will be no use for you to say anything more."

"Why didn't you tell me this before, Nell?"

"I did, plainer than any words."

"Yes, perhaps you did. But why didn't you speak, and tell me so?"

"There was a reason which it is not necessary for me to explain."

"Ah, I know the reason. I see through your little game now. You were using me as a tool, that was all. But, damn you, I'll get even with you. That little matter can soon be attended to, and then you'll find out your mistake."

Nell's face was very white and strained, and with difficulty she kept her outward calmness. Had she but

realised that eyes glowing with hatred and jealousy were watching her from the bushes a short distance away, she would have broken down completely.

"I believe you are capable of doing almost anything, Ben," she replied, "and accordingly any injury you might do to us and our little home will be no surprise. I am going back to the house now. It is no use for us to talk any longer."

Nell moved away from the trees, hoping that Ben would go back the way he had come. But she was not to get clear of him so easily. He stepped quickly to her side, and demanded what she meant by the words she had just uttered.

"Surely you must know," she told him. "If I had the least spark of affection for you, which I did not have, it would have been quenched by your action at the dance in the hall, and what you did last night."

"Last night! What did I do last night?"

"You know as well as I do, and I think a great deal better. One who will hound on others to attack a lone man on a dark night is not worthy to be called a man, but should be listed with the brutes of the jungle."

An oath leaped from Ben's lips and he gripped Nell by the arm.

"Who told you that?" he growled. "How dare you make such a charge?"

"I dare make it because I know it is true. How I know it is my own affair. Let go my arm at once, and don't you touch me again."

Nell's eyes were blazing with anger now, and Ben shrank back cowed. The serpent within him could not endure the righteous indignation of the pure and noble woman before him. He knew that what she said was

"You can call it what you like, I don't care. You may scorn me now, but my turn will come."

Waiting to hear no more, Nell left him, hurried into the house and closed the door. She partly expected him to follow her, so she stood for a while in the middle of the kitchen listening with fast-beating heart. After she had waited for several minutes and no sound was heard outside, she lighted the lamp and drew down the blinds. Then she sat down upon a chair by the side of the table and buried her face in her hands. She was very tired and almost heartbroken over what had just taken place. She knew how vindictive Ben would be, and when she thought of her helpless father and sister and what her decision might mean to them, she almost repented of her action. But when she thought of Ben and what a creature he really was, she felt that anything was better than to be in the least manner connected with him. Let him do his utmost, there would still be some way, surely, whereby they could make a living.

She sat thus for some time, and it seemed to her as if her brain must burst from the confusion of thought. She must do something to relieve her strained feelings. There was plenty to be done, and she at once began to fold some clothes which had been left over from the previous day's washing, and which she had not had time to iron. Her fingers moved rapidly, keeping pace with her thoughts.

She had been engaged at this work but a short time when she heard a step at the door. Then there was the sound of some one lifting the latch. Could it be Ben coming? she asked herself. What would she do? What could she say to him? As she stood there hesitating,

the door slowly opened, and instead of Ben, Jean Benton stood before her. Nell breathed a sigh of relief when she saw her, though the expression upon the girl's face startled her.

"Oh, Jean!" she exclaimed, "how you did frighten me! Come and sit down, for you look tired."

Jean made no reply but stood there with her eyes fixed upon Nell's face. They were wild eyes, and they caused Nell to tremble. Was Jean mad? she wondered, and what would she do with her? What did she want, anyway?

"Won't you sit down?" she asked, not knowing what else to say.

Jean took a step or two forward, and so fierce was her look that Nell shrank back.

"Jean, Jean, what's the matter?" she demanded. "Why do you look at me that way?"

Jean suddenly lifted her right hand, and pointed her forefinger at the trembling woman before her.

"You stole him from me," she hissed. "You took him away when I needed him most. Ah, that is what you have done, and you needn't try to deny it."

For an instant Nell was unable to comprehend the meaning of Jean's words. Then the truth flashed upon her mind. The girl was mad with jealousy. She imagined that she had stolen Ben from her.

"Jean, Jean, listen to me," she pleaded. "I haven't taken Ben from you, if that is what you mean. He came to me of his own accord, and I have refused to have anything more to do with him."

"You lie!" the half-crazed woman cried. "I saw you together to-night, talking by the tree and by the

house. His arm was around you. I saw it all, and you needn't deny it."

"Listen to me," Nell ordered, now much annoyed. "Won't you believe me? I tell you I have not taken him from you. He was with me to-night for the last time. I told him to go and never to come back again. Why do you blame me? Ben is the one to blame. If he has deserted you, why don't you go to him?"

"He isn't to blame," Jean cried. "Don't try to clear yourself, Nell Strong. You have stolen him, and you know it. But you won't have him. He shall never be yours."

Quick as a flash, Jean thrust her right hand into the bosom of her dress, and ripped forth a sharp knife. Like a tiger she sprang upon Nell. Instinctively the latter stepped back and raised her left arm to ward off the blow, which thus received the knife meant for her heart. With almost superhuman effort Nell hurled her assailant from her, drew forth the knife from the quivering flesh, and threw it behind her. The blood was streaming from her arm, but she kept her eyes fixed upon the baffled girl before her, not knowing what she might do next. But the sight of blood seemed to satisfy Jean. She gloated over her deed, and with a wild mocking laugh, she opened the door and sped out into the night.

With a great effort Nell overcame the deathly feeling of faintness which came upon her. Quickly she locked the door, and then turned her attention to her injured arm. The wound was still bleeding profusely, and it was with considerable difficulty that she was at length able to stop the flow of blood. The gash was not as deep as she had first expected. The knife in falling

had struck a glancing blow just below the shoulder on the outer part of the arm. For this Nell was thankful, but she shuddered as she thought of what her assailant really intended to do.

When the wound had been carefully bound up, Nell sat down by the side of the table and thought over what had just taken place. But for the pain in her arm she might have considered it nothing more than a terrible dream. She had never imagined that Jean, who in the past had been so gentle, good, and loving, could be so changed. But she knew that jealousy was the cause, and jealousy could be as cruel as the grave.

After she had burnt up the clothes with which she had staunched the wound, and wiped up the stains on the floor, Nell went slowly up to her own room. But she could not sleep, for the excitement through which she had recently passed caused her brain to throb and her head to ache. She tossed restlessly upon her bed, and finding that she could get no rest she got up and paced rapidly up and down the room. At times she thought she would go mad like Jean, as she recalled all that had taken place. She glanced into the mirror, and was astonished at the haggard face which confronted her there. What was she to do?

Presently her eyes rested upon her mother's picture hanging on the wall. She studied it lovingly and longingly, and then, "Mother! Mother!" burst from her lips. "Oh, I want you, I want you! Come to me to-night, and comfort me as of old."

And as she stood there her mother's parting words came to her mind. "Nellie," she had said, "you are young and a great responsibility rests upon you. You will fail if you try to bear it alone. There is One to

Whom you can always go, and He will help you in all your troubles."

At once a new light came into her eyes. There was One who had promised to help. Why had she forgotten Him? Kneeling down by the side of her bed, she prayed as she had never prayed before. And as she thus knelt, a new peace stole into her heart, and it seemed to her as if a divine presence pervaded the room, bringing a restful balm to her weary body and mind.

CHAPTER XVIII

SILENT STRIFE

DOUGLAS was hoeing corn on a patch of ground near the road. It was a beautiful day, and the air was filled with teeming life of bird and insect. But the silent worker was in no mood to enjoy the fair morning. He was thinking deeply of what he had witnessed down by the river the evening before. As far as he could tell, Nell and Ben were on most friendly terms, for he knew nothing of the stormy scene which had taken place between them.

Across the road was the rectory, seeming more dilapidated than ever, so he thought. Only yesterday he had looked at it, and a picture had come into his mind of the building renewed, the house set to rights, and Nell crowning it all by her grace and beauty. He had imagined her in the garden, among the roses, sweet-peas and morning-glories, the fairest flower of them all. He knew just how she would look, and what a joy it would be to her to tend the various plants. And then what a welcome she would give him upon his return from some parish work. He had dreamed of it all out in the field, and it had made him very happy. What a success he would make of life with Nell's inspiration and helpfulness. But now his vision was shattered, and the future looked dark and lonely. Nell could never be his, and why should he think of her any more? She

had given herself, no doubt, to Ben Stubbles, so that ended it.

It seemed to Douglas as if everything he undertook was a failure. He had not succeeded with his work at St. Margaret's, and he had become entangled in a quarrel in the very parish where he was shortly expected to come as rector, the solution of which he could not see. Instead of bringing peace to troubled Church waters, and harmony out of chaos, he had apparently made matters worse by his interference. Added to this, he was deeply in love with the one woman he could not hope to win.

As he moved slowly up and down the rows thinking of these things, Empty appeared suddenly before him. The lad was breathing hard and seemed greatly agitated.

"Hello, Empty! what's wrong?" Douglas enquired, pausing in his work.

"Go fer the doctor, quick," Empty panted. "Jean's sick, very sick, an' ma sent me fer you. She can't spare me a minute, so I must hustle back. Will ye go?"

"Certainly," Douglas replied. "But when did Jean become ill? She seemed all right last night."

"She took sick jist a little while ago. Oh, hurry! Don't waste time talkin'. An', say, ye might drop in an' tell her dad. Joe's very uneasy 'bout Jean."

Douglas wished to ask Empty a number of questions, but having delivered his message, the lad left him and sped like a deer by a short-cut across the field. The telephone was at the store and Douglas lost no time in getting there. Several people were standing before the counter as he entered the building, who listened with great interest as he asked the store-keeper

for the use of the telephone. Then as he spoke to the doctor, requesting him to hurry at once to Mrs. Dempster's, the curiosity of the bystanders became intense. They would have something to discuss among themselves, and a choice bit of gossip would soon be in circulation throughout the parish.

When Douglas left the store, he made his way to the shoemaker's. He found Joe at his bench, half-soling a pair of shoes. He greeted his visitor cordially, and offered him a seat upon the only chair the room contained.

"I haven't time to sit down this morning," Douglas told him. "I have just called up the doctor, and dropped in to see you for a minute."

"Called up the doctor!" Joe repeated, while an anxious look came into his eyes. "Who's sick?"

"It is Jean. She is not very well."

"Ah, I was afraid of it," and the old man laid aside the shoe, and looked intently into his visitor's face. "Poor lassie, she must have caught cold out on the hills that night. Is she at Mrs. Dempster's yet?"

"Yes. Empty came for me this morning, and he had to go right back."

"I must go at once." Joe rose from the bench as he spoke and untied his leather apron. "Jean may need me now."

"Would it not be better for your wife to go?" Douglas asked. "A woman can generally do more in a sick room than a man."

Joe shook his head as he carefully folded the apron and laid it on the bench.

"No, she couldn't very well go. She hasn't been that far in a long time. It's her foot, you see. It's been

troubling her for years. Jean'll have to come home, and then she can look after her. Just wait, I'll be with you in a minute."

As the two walked along the road there was little said for a time. Joe seemed to be lost in thought, and occasionally he gave a deep sigh.

"I am thinking," he at length remarked, "that this sickness will be for Jean's good. It may be that the Lord has a hand in it, and He will lead her home through the valley of trouble. He did it in olden days, and I believe He does the same now."

"Have you any idea what is the matter with your daughter?" Douglas enquired. "What do you suppose has caused such a great change in her from what she was before she left home?"

"I have never heard," Joe slowly replied. "Jean would not tell me."

"But there must have been something, Mr. Benton. It is not natural for a girl who was brought up so carefully to change in such a short time."

Douglas knew the nature of Jean's illness, and he was anxious that Joe's mind might be somewhat prepared for the shock. He felt that he could do no more than give a hint.

"Jean has been working too hard," the old man replied. "She was always a great worker, and I think she is run down and her mind is somewhat affected. She will be all right as soon as she gets over this sickness."

"But what about the letter you received from the city?" Douglas persisted. "Didn't it show that there must have been something wrong there? She was sent home for repairs, was she not?"

"I have thought it all over, sir, night and day, and we have talked about it a great deal. Jean has done nothing wrong, mark my word. I thought at first that perhaps she had, but I know better now. Why, it's not in that child to do anything wrong. She's always been as innocent as a baby. She was led astray for a time, that's all."

Douglas had not the heart to say anything more. He left Joe when they came to the corn patch, and picked up his hoe. He stood and watched the old man ambling along the road, and a feeling of deep pity came into his heart. Why should such a worthy man have to endure so much? he asked himself. He knew the cause of the trouble, and his thoughts turned to the cowardly cur who had brought such misery upon the humble home. It was not right that Ben should escape, and he felt that something should be done to expose the villain. But if he told what he knew, who would believe him? Ben would defy him to produce evidence of his dastardly deed, and most of the people in the place would side with him. They would say that Jake's hired man had trumped up a lie about Ben Stubbles out of mere spite.

Douglas brooded over this during the rest of the morning, and as he continued his work after dinner he was still thinking about it and wondering what he could do to bring about Ben's deserved punishment and humiliation. It was galling to him to see the fellow strutting about and lording it over everybody.

About the middle of the afternoon, happening to glance down the road, he was astonished to see Joe walking slowly along, swaying from side to side, as if he were dizzy or had been drinking. Douglas believed

that something more than usual was the matter, and by the time the old man had reached the corn patch he was standing by the side of the road.

"What is wrong?" he asked. "Is Jean dead?"

"Worse than dead," was the low reply. "Oh, if she were only dead! God help my Jean, my darling Jean!"

Joe's face was drawn and haggard. His eyes were red as if they had been rubbed hard and long. His body trembled so violently that Douglas feared that he might collapse where he stood.

"Won't you sit down?" he asked. "You must be tired. Rest awhile."

"Sit down! Rest!" Joe slowly repeated, as if he did not fully comprehend the words. "How dare I think of rest with my poor child's troubles on my mind?"

He ceased and let his eyes roam across the fields toward the Dempster home. Then he straightened himself up and turning to his companion clutched him fiercely by the arm. His lips moved, though no word was uttered. But his eyes and face said all that was necessary. A heartbroken father was being torn by a wild passion, and what anger is more terrible than that caused by an injury to an offspring, whether of man or beast? Douglas made no effort to soothe the grief-stricken man. He realised that the storm must beat itself out, and that words of comfort or sympathy would be empty sounds falling on unheeding ears. He knew that silence is never more golden than in the presence of overmastering grief.

At first he thought that Joe's passion was that of anger alone for the one who had outraged his daughter. But presently, he intuitively divined that the

struggle was deeper than that. He felt that it was a conflict between right and wrong; the desire of the savage beast thirsting for revenge, contending with the Christ-like spirit of forgiveness. Now he longed to speak, to utter some word that would decide the battle for the right. But never did he feel so helpless. He recalled several appropriate texts of Scripture, but he did not quote them. Why he did not do so he could not tell. He realised the importance of the moment, and felt like a coward for his helplessness. If the beast nature should win, no end of harm might be done. What should he do?

Presently an idea flashed into his mind. Why had he not thought of it before? he asked himself.

Taking Joe by the arm, he led him from the road to a large maple tree standing near the edge of the field.

"Sit down under the shade," he ordered, "and wait until I come back."

Joe at first refused, and declared that he did not want to rest. But under his companion's gentle yet firm urging he sank upon the grass and buried his face in his hands.

Leaving him there, Douglas hastened to the house. In a few minutes he returned, carrying his violin. Joe never looked up as he approached, but remained, huddled upon the ground, the very epitome of abject despair.

At once Douglas began to play strong, violent music, in keeping with Joe's feelings. Each note suggested a tempest, and as the playing continued, the old man lifted his head and Douglas noted the gleam in his eyes and the angry expression upon his face. At that

moment he was ready for action, for revenge dire and swift.

But gradually the music changed. It became soft and low. It appealed to the better and higher nature. It was like the revivifying breath of spring after winter's sternness, and the sun's radiant smile following the raging tempest. It affected Joe. The light in his eyes changed, and his face softened. His body relaxed. Then the player knew that the victory was won. Gently he drifted off to the old, familiar hymns of "Nearer My God to Thee," and "Abide with Me."

As the last note died upon the air, Joe rose slowly from the ground. He said nothing, but reaching out he clasped Douglas by the hand. Then with head erect and a new light in his eyes, he turned and made his way slowly toward the road.

CHAPTER XIX

WARMER THAN HE EXPECTED

JOE had gone but a short distance up the road when Ben Stubbles met him in his car, and enveloped him in a cloud of dust. Ben was alone and he scowled as the old man stepped aside to let him pass. Douglas, who was watching, felt thankful that Joe was ignorant of the driver's part in Jean's ruin.

Seeing Douglas standing under the tree, Ben drew up his car and asked him what he was doing there.

"Attending to my own affairs," was the cool reply.

"Amusing the old man, eh? You must have a damn lot of work to do if you can afford to waste your time that way."

"That, too, is my own affair, and not yours. Have you anything more to say?"

"Sure I have. I want to know what you are doing here."

"Why shouldn't I be here?"

"But you received orders to leave."

"Who gave them?"

"Dad, of course."

"What right had he to order me away?"

"Oh, he rules here."

"Well, he doesn't rule me, and I shall leave when I get ready, and not before."

"You'll change your tune before long, though."

"I will, eh?"

"Sure. You'll find this place so damn hot for you that you'll be glad to get out."

"H'm," and Douglas gave a sarcastic laugh. "You have tried to make it hot for me already, so I believe. How did you succeed?"

"What do you mean?" Ben demanded.

"You know as well as I do. You set two men upon me the other night, as you were too much of a coward to face me yourself. Now you understand my meaning. If you want to make things hot for me, step right out here. Now is your chance."

"I wouldn't foul my hands fighting a thing like you," Ben snarled.

"No, simply because you know what would happen to you. You are too cowardly to face a man, but you have no hesitation about ruining an innocent girl, and leaving her to a miserable fate."

At these words Ben clutched the door of his car, threw it open and stepped quickly out upon the road. His face was livid with rage, and his body was trembling.

"Explain yourself!" he shouted. "How dare you make such a charge?"

Douglas at once stepped across to where Ben was standing, and looked him full in the eyes.

"Is it necessary for me to explain?" he asked. "Surely you have not forgotten what you did at Long Wharf in the city?"

"Do! What did I do?" Ben gasped, while his face turned a sickly hue.

"You pushed Jean Benton over the wharf into the harbour and left her to drown; that is what you did."

Douglas spoke slowly and impressively, and each word fell like a deadly blow upon the man before him. His face, pale a minute before, was now like death. He tried to speak but the words rattled in his throat. He grasped the side of the car for support, and then made an effort to recover his composure. The perspiration stood in great beads on his forehead, and his staring eyes never left the face of his accuser.

"I wish you could see yourself," the latter quietly remarked. "You'd certainly make a great picture. When you threatened to make this place too hot for me, you didn't expect to feel very uncomfortable that way yourself in such a short time, did you?"

"W-who in the devil's name are you?" Ben gasped.

"Oh, I don't pretend to be as intimate with the devil as you are, and appealing to me in his name doesn't do any good. It makes no difference who I am. You know that what I just said is true, and you can't deny it."

"But suppose I do deny it, what then?"

"H'm, you are talking nonsense now. It's no use for you to do any bluffing. The victim of your deviltry is lying sick unto death at Mrs. Dempster's. You had better go to her at once and make what amends you can before it is too late."

"Ah, I know," Ben replied, regaining somewhat his former composure. "Jean has been stuffing you with lies. She's a little vixen, and wants to get me into trouble."

"Look here," and Douglas' voice was stern as he spoke. "Don't you begin anything like that. I have never spoken a word to Jean Benton, and as far as I know she has never said anything about your cowardly

deed to her. She is as true as steel in her love for you, and my advice is for you to act like a man, go to her, be true to her, and marry her as you promised you would that night you hurled her into the harbour."

"You are lying," Ben blustered. "If Jean didn't tell you this cock-and-bull yarn, how would you know anything about it?"

"I am not lying, Ben Stubbles. There were eyes watching your every action that night on Long Wharf; there were ears listening to what you said, and but for these hands of mine Jean Benton would be dead, and you would now be arrested for murdering her."

"You! You heard, and saw, and saved her!" Ben gasped, shrinking back from before the steady gaze of his pitiless accuser.

"I did," was the quiet reply.

"Were you alone?"

"Do you think I could have lifted her wet body from the water myself? No, I had help. But never mind that now. You go to Jean and make love to no one else."

The strain through which he had just passed was telling severely upon Ben. He mopped his face and forehead with his handkerchief. His sense of fear was passing and anger was taking its place. It annoyed him to think that he should be thus cornered and affected by Jake Jukes' hired man. Then his opponent's closing words roused the fire in his soul, and he turned angrily upon him.

"Ah, I see through your little game now," he cried. "You are jealous of me."

"Jealous of you! In what way?"

"You want Nell Strong, that's it. Ah, I understand

it all. You want to take her away from me, don't you? I suppose you have told her this yarn about me, and that accounts for something that took place last night. You devil incarnate! I'll get even with you for what you have done!"

"If I were you I would be too ashamed to say anything more," Douglas calmly replied. "I have not told Miss Strong about your cowardly deed, though I think she should know of it. It would be an act of mercy if a word might save her from such a brute as you."

So intent were the two men upon what they were saying, that they did not notice Nell coming toward them down the road. She was only a few yards away as Douglas finished speaking. She heard the heated words, but could not understand their meaning. She was hoping that she might pass as quickly as possible, as she did not wish to have anything to say to Ben.

Douglas, standing facing the road, was the first to see her, and he at once lifted his hat. He thought she never looked so beautiful, clad as she was in a simple dress, and a plain sailor-hat on her head. She seemed like an angel of mercy sent to bring peace to their strife.

Ben, however, had no such thoughts. When he turned and saw who was approaching, he at once recalled the previous evening, and what Nell had said to him. He was glad, too, of any excuse to get away from his opponent who had given him such a galling time. And this was an opportunity, as well, to embarrass the woman who had repelled him. These thoughts flashed through his mind in the twinkling of an eye.

"Hello, Nell," he accosted. "Going down the road?

Better get in and have a drive. I'm going that way myself."

"I prefer to walk, thank you," Nell quietly replied.

"Oh, nonsense. Get in and have a drive," Ben insisted.

Douglas noted that Nell's face became somewhat pale. Her clear eyes, filled with courage, never wavered. She had made up her mind and he knew that nothing could change her from her purpose. She did not at once reply to Ben's request.

"Get in," he ordered, "and don't be foolish."

"I tell you I prefer to walk," she repeated. "I am quite satisfied with my own company this afternoon."

With this parting thrust, Nell was about to resume her walk when Ben with a savage oath sprang toward her.

"No, you don't get away as easy as that," he roared. "I want to know the meaning of such actions."

Nell's anger was now aroused, and she turned swiftly upon the brute.

"You know very well why I will not ride with you. Have you forgotten last night? This is the King's highway, and I am at liberty to go as I please."

"To h—— with the King," Ben retorted, as he reached out and caught her fiercely by the arm.

At once a cry of pain broke from Nell's lips, and wildly she tore away the gripping fingers. Her face was distorted with pain, and her right hand pressed firmly her wounded arm.

Ben's oath concerning the King caused Douglas' face to darken and his eyes to blaze. He sprang quickly forward, and seized the wretch by the collar just as Nell forced his grip from her arm. He shook him as

a terrier would shake a rat and left him at length sprawling in the middle of the road, his clothes all covered with dust.

"If you want some more, get up," Douglas remarked, as he stood viewing his prostrate victim. "How dare you insult the King, and lay your foul hands upon this woman? Get up, I tell you, and clear out of this at once."

As Ben made no effort to obey, but lay there with his face to the ground, Douglas reached down, caught him by the coat collar, and landed him on his feet.

"Take your car and get away from here," he ordered. "Don't open your mouth, or it won't be well for you."

With face livid with rage and with shaking limbs, Ben did as he was commanded. He was thoroughly cowed, and not once did he look back as he crawled into his car, started it, and sped down the road.

Douglas paid no more attention to Ben but turned immediately toward Nell.

"I am sorry for what has happened," he apologised. "I hope you——"

He stopped suddenly, for he noticed a deep crimson stain on the white dress where Ben had clutched her arm.

"Did he do that?" he exclaimed, stepping quickly forward. "Oh, if I had only known sooner the extent of your injury, he would not have escaped so easily."

"He did not do it all," Nell replied with a slight smile. "There is a wound on my arm, and unfortunately Ben's fingers gripped me there. It will be all right when it is re-dressed."

For a few seconds Douglas stood looking at her with-

out speaking. Her courage appealed to him, and her beauty made her almost irresistible. His brain was in a tumultuous riot of conflicting emotions. How he longed to comfort her, to take her in his arms, and tell her all that was in his heart. He was almost jubilant, for he knew now that she had cast off Ben forever, and there was hope for him.

Nell noted his ardent gaze and her eyes dropped, while a deep flush replaced the pallor of her face.

"I must go now," she quietly remarked, though it was evident she was not anxious to leave. "I was on my way to see Jean. I understand the poor girl is quite ill."

"But you must not go with your arm bleeding that way," Douglas protested. "You must come into the house and have it dressed. I know that Mrs. Jukes will gladly do it, that is, if you prefer to have her."

"I prefer that you should dress it," Nell replied. "I do not wish any one else to see the wound in my arm, and I know you will say nothing about it to any one. I feel that I can trust you."

CHAPTER XX

CONFIDENCE

MRS. JUKES was greatly puzzled over all that had taken place out upon the road. She had been watching from a front window, and at times had been tempted to go for Jake that he might witness the interesting scene. But she was afraid that she might miss something if she left even for a few minutes. When she saw Nell and Douglas coming to the house, she was at the door ready to receive them.

"Well, I declare," she exclaimed, "if you folks haven't been having a time out on the road this afternoon. It was mighty lucky that no teams passed, or the horses would have run away with fright at your actions."

"I am afraid you will discharge me for neglecting my work," Douglas laughingly replied.

"I guess you needn't worry about that. It all depends on what caused you to neglect your work, and it was a mighty good one, if I'm any judge. My, I was glad to see you roll Ben Stubbles in the dust. What's he been up to, now?"

"You saw him clutch Miss Strong by the arm, didn't you?" Douglas asked.

"Indeed I did."

"Well, then, see," and he pointed to the stain on Nell's dress. "We need a little warm water and soft

bandages, or something that will do for the present."

"My lands! did that brute do that?" Mrs. Jukes exclaimed. "It's no wonder you rolled him in the dust. Just come inside and I'll get what you want in a jiffy."

Very gently and with considerable skill Douglas washed and dressed the injured arm. He made no comment about the nature of the wound, though it was not hard for him to surmise in what way it had been inflicted. He saw where the knife had pierced the soft flesh, and his hands trembled slightly as he thought how serious must have been the attack, and how great the strain upon Nell's nerves.

"You are as good as a doctor," she laughingly told him. "No one could do any better than that."

"Oh, I took a course in First Aid at one time, and the knowledge I gained has served me in good stead on many occasions." Douglas was just on the point of saying that it was at college where he had learned such things, and that then he had been seriously thinking of becoming a medical missionary. It was the nearest he had come to giving himself away since he had been at Rixton, and he determined to be more cautious in the future.

Mrs. Jukes insisted that Nell should remain for supper.

"I would have had it ready now," she told her, "if I hadn't spent so much time at the window. But I guess it was worth it. I won't be long, anyway, and Jake has not come from the field yet."

Douglas was greatly pleased when Nell at last consented to stay. He went out to bring in Jake, and when he returned, he found Nell playing with the Jukes' children. Her face was bright and animated,

and she seemed to have forgotten all about her recent troubles. The little ones were delighted at the stories she told them, as well as the games she knew, and they would not leave her when supper was ready, but insisted on sitting next to her at the table. Douglas sat opposite, and he was perfectly content to let the others talk. Nell was near; he could look upon her face, and listen to what she said, and he was satisfied.

Jake was in great spirits when he learned what had happened.

"Great punkins!" he exclaimed. "I wish I'd been there to have seen it."

"But what about the corn?" Douglas asked. "It didn't get much hoeing to-day."

"Never mind about the corn, John. Ye kin hoe it agin, but ye might never git another chance to roll Ben Stubbles in the dust. Ho, ho, that was a good one!"

When Nell left to return home, it was but natural that Douglas should accompany her. He asked permission to do so, and her acceptance brought a great joy to his heart.

The Jukes watched them as they walked toward the road.

"That's settled, all right," was Mrs. Jukes' comment.

"What?" Jake asked.

"Why, can't you see for yourself? They're deep in love with each other, that's what it is."

"Umph!" Jake grunted. "I never thought of it before. It takes a woman to see sich things. My, John'll git a prize if he hooks Nell. Strange that she takes

to him, an' him only a hired man. Why, she's fit fer a parson's wife."

"I don't believe he's only a hired man," his wife replied.

"Woman, what d'ye mean?" Jake demanded in surprise.

"Oh, I don't exactly know. But he's the queerest hired man I ever saw. He's got a good education, and just think how he plays the fiddle. Why, he is wasting his time working as a hired man for small wages, when he might be earning big money somewhere else. That's what's been puzzling me for days."

"Mebbe he's a dook or a prince, Susie, in disguise. I've heered of sich things. But he's a prince all right, fer I don't know when I met a man I think as much of as him. An' as fer farm work, why he can't be beat. He knows it from A to Z, an' that's sayin' a good deal."

"I wonder what Ben will do now?" Mrs. Jukes mused. "He must be about wild. I saw him go up the road in his car just before supper, and he was driving like mad."

"He'll do something, mark my word," Jake replied. "He'll try to git even with John somehow. I should have given him warnin'. He shouldn't be out at night. It isn't safe."

"Oh, he can take care of himself, all right. I'm not anxious about him, though I am quite nervous concerning Nell. Ben and the rest of the Stubbles will do their best to make it hard for her."

Nell and Douglas did not go up the road, but walked slowly down across the field toward the river. It was a roundabout way, but that suited them both, as they would have more time together, and this latter was far

more private. For the time being, they were happy, talking and laughing like two joyous children. Their faces were radiant, and their eyes were filled with animation when at length they reached the river and stopped by the old tree where Douglas had first seen Nell.

"This has been a wonderful day to me," he remarked, as he stood looking out over the water. "I little realised this morning that we would be standing here now. It was here that I first saw you, and heard you playing over by that tree."

"Don't mention that night," Nell pleaded. "I want to forget it, and everything that is past."

"And this afternoon, too?"

"Everything except your great kindness to me. I shall never forget that, and I don't want to, either."

"I am so glad that I was able to rescue you from that brute. My only regret is that I was not near to save you from harm last night. If I had been there, that would not have happened," and he motioned to her wounded arm.

Nell turned her face quickly to his and her eyes expressed a great wonder.

"Why, how did you learn about that?" she enquired. "Who told you?"

"No one. I am an amateur Sherlock Holmes, and have drawn my own conclusions from what I have seen and surmised. Jean is jealous of you, and 'that way madness lies.' Am I not right?"

"You certainly are," and a tremour shook Nell's body as she recalled the incident of the previous evening. "Oh, it was terrible! Jean is so jealous of me. She thinks that I have taken Ben from her, and she would

not believe a word I told her. She would listen to nothing, but said I was lying."

"And you were not?" Douglas eagerly asked.

"No. I simply told her the truth, and that Ben is nothing to me, and that I never tried to take him from her. But she would not believe me."

A feeling of wonderful rapture came into Douglas' soul as he listened to this candid confession. So Ben was nothing to Nell. It was almost too good to be true. There was hope for him.

"But you often met Ben by the tree over there, did you not?" he at length questioned. "It was there I first saw you when you played such sweet music. I remember he joined you that evening."

For a while Nell remained silent with her eyes fixed thoughtfully upon the ground. Douglas was afraid that he had said too much, and had offended her. But when she lifted her face and he saw the expression upon it, he knew that he was wrong. Her cheeks were aglow with animation and her eyes beamed with eagerness.

"Do you mind if I tell you something?" she asked. "Part of it is known only to Nan and me. I feel that I can trust you."

"I shall be delighted to hear," Douglas replied, "and I am most grateful for your confidence in me."

"I am very much worried about what will happen to us and our little home," she began. "You see, when father was a professor at Passdale he bought this place for a summer residence, and my dear mother always loved it so much. When he became blind, we moved here, and lived very comfortably because he had a private income. But in a fatal moment he was induced

to invest all he had in the Big Chief gold mine out west. Every one was talking about it and what a splendid investment it was. We were sure that in a few months we would be very rich. But you know what happened to that. There was bad management somewhere, the works shut down, and so many people were ruined."

"Indeed I know," Douglas emphatically replied. "I was bitten, too, and lost my all. It wasn't much, to be sure, but it meant a great deal to me."

"It was ruin to us," Nell continued. "For a while I thought father would go out of his mind, he felt so badly. Then, to add to our trouble, Nan became ill, and it took our last dollar to pay the doctor and other expenses. At length, we were forced to mortgage the place to Mr. Stubbles to pay our grocery bill which had grown so large. It is that which has been hanging over our home like a terrible cloud for several years now."

Nell paused and looked out over the water. The glow of evening touched her face and soft hair, and made her seem to the young man watching her as if she were not of this earth, so beautiful did she appear. What right had such a woman to be troubled? he asked himself. How he longed to do something to help her.

"So you came to the rescue, and started farming."

"There was nothing else to do," she smilingly replied. "I felt the responsibility, and had to do something. I didn't know much about gardening at first, and made many mistakes. But we have managed to live, pay the interest on the mortgage and part of the principal. But we are in danger of losing everything now," she added with a note of sadness in her voice.

"In what way?"

"You see, the mortgage was due the first of July, and it should have been paid then. But we did not have the money, not even enough to pay the interest. Our garden did not do very well last year, and the winter was a hard one. After we had paid father's life insurance, there was very little left. We did not know what to do and were greatly depressed. It was then that father went with Nan to the city and played on the streets. I knew nothing about it until they came home with the money they received through your kindness. We were thus enabled to pay the interest on the mortgage, as well as our grocery bill at the store. You little realise how grateful we are to you for what you did for us."

"I have never been so thankful for anything I ever did," Douglas earnestly replied. "Little did I realise that night when I stopped to watch your father play, what the outcome of my act would be. But now that the interest is paid, how is it that you are in danger of losing your home?"

"Simply because Mr. Stubbles wants the money. It is only a small amount now, and by another summer we could have it all paid."

"But surely Stubbles doesn't need the money. I understand that he is very rich."

"I am not so certain about that. There have been rumours abroad for some time now that he is not as rich as people imagine, and that he is having some difficulty in carrying on his business. Anyway, when I went to see him about the mortgage, he told me in no gentle way that he must have the money and at once.

If not, he said he would foreclose and sell the place. But he has not done so yet."

"Why?" Douglas asked the question eagerly. He believed that he knew the reason now, and if his surmise were true it would explain something which had puzzled and worried him for days past.

"He has been waiting, that is all," Nell's voice was low as she spoke. Her eyes were fixed upon the ground, and a deep, rich flush was mantling her cheeks and brow. Then she lifted her head and spoke with considerable embarrassment. "Yes, he has been waiting," she repeated, "waiting for something to happen. It all depended upon that."

"I know. He has been waiting to see what answer you would give to Ben. Is that it?"

"Yes, that's it."

"And you have refused him?"

"Couldn't you tell that by what happened this afternoon?"

"Certainly. But I wished to hear it from your own lips. And so you think Stubbles will be very angry and will foreclose at once?"

"There is no doubt about it. I am sure that he will. Ben will see to that. I am afraid you do not know the Stubbles yet. They will stop at nothing, especially the men."

"I think I know something, more perhaps than you realise," and a slight smile flitted across Douglas' face. "And I believe I know now," he added, "why you met Ben by the old tree. There was so much at stake that you did not wish to offend him."

"You have guessed right. Oh, it was terrible! I felt like a hypocrite all the time, and yet I had not

the courage to refuse meeting him for fear of what would happen."

"But you had the courage at last, though?"

"It was only when I could stand him no longer. I knew for some time that he was not a good man, but his actions of late have so disgusted me beyond all bounds of endurance that I refused to have anything more to do with him. There, I have told you all, and I feel greatly relieved."

"I suppose you hardly know what you will do if you lose your place. Is there not some one from whom you could borrow enough money to pay off the mortgage?"

"I am afraid not. We have no security to give, and, besides, I dread the thought of asking for help. Father will be almost heartbroken, and it will make him more bitter than ever."

"At what?"

"The Church and all connected with it. Mr. Stubbles has been a warden here for years, and the way he has acted has been partly the cause of father's bitter feelings. Now he will be worse than ever. I wonder what the new clergyman will be like."

"Perhaps he may be able to settle matters."

"I am afraid not. He will have to do as the Stubbles say or leave, just as the others did. If he should happen to be a very strong-minded man and will stand up for justice and right, he will have a most difficult time of it. In that case, father would be his firm friend, though I fear he could do but little to help him."

"His moral assistance would mean much, though, would it not?"

"Perhaps so," and Nell sighed. "But I think I must

go home now. Father and Nan will be wondering what has kept me. Won't you come and see father? I know he wants to talk to you about his book. I am thankful he has something to occupy his mind."

CHAPTER XXI

OUTDONE

WHEN they reached the house, they found Nan up in arms. She scolded Nell for being away so long and leaving her to get supper and wash the dishes.

"I don't think it is fair," she pouted. "You go off and have a good time, while I must stay home and drudge like a slave."

"You do not look any the worse for it," Douglas laughingly told her. "It seems to agree with you. I never saw you look better."

"H'm," and Nan tossed her head. "It may agree with my complexion but not with my temper. The only way you can make me good natured is to have a game of checkers with me. I am just dying for a game. No one here will play with me. It's too giddy, I suppose. I'm sure it's much nicer than Shakespeare—he's too dry. Why, I've been reading to daddy for the last hour, and I can't remember one word."

The professor was most anxious to discuss his book, but Nan insisted on checkers first.

"I have a right to my own way for once," she insisted. "You promised me long ago that I could have Mr. Handyman to myself the next time he came. But, no, it was Shakespeare and Church matters, and so I was pushed aside."

They all laughed heartily at her words and gestures, and the professor at last agreed that they should play two games. Then he had something important to say.

With Nan's animated face beaming over the board, and Nell sitting quietly sewing by the table, it was a most enjoyable evening to Douglas. But the professor was not so happy. The minutes dragged heavily, so when the players had won a game each, he gave a sigh of relief and claimed Douglas' special attention.

"I wish to discuss several points in the tragedy of Hamlet," he began. "I am not altogether sure in my own mind, and would like to have your opinion."

Though Douglas had studied Hamlet at college, yet he felt very diffident about discussing the "several points," which he felt sure would be difficult ones. But as the professor began to talk, he knew that his opinion would not be necessary. Once launched upon his subject, the old man seemed to imagine that he was once more in the class room. Several times he asked Nell to read certain extracts from his notes, and upon these he always enlarged. It was pathetic to observe his intense eagerness, and he was certain that his visitor was keenly interested in his subject.

It was well for him that he could not see into the hearts and minds of the others in the room. Nan was lost in a story book she had borrowed from a girl friend that very afternoon; while Nell's thoughts were not upon the wonders of Shakespeare, but upon the events of the day. Douglas tried to pay strict attention to what was being said, though his eyes would often wander to the young woman sewing just in front of him. He noted the varying expressions upon her face, and he intuitively surmised something of what she was

thinking. How he longed to be talking with her and listening to her as it had been his privilege that afternoon. Could she ever care for him? he asked himself just at the very instant when the professor was waxing eloquent about Shakespeare as an artist. He tried to listen, but the force of the words of wisdom were lost upon him. The professor, however, was pleased, and as Douglas rose to go he told him how delightful had been their conversation, and that the several points which had been troubling him were quite clear.

Douglas' heart was happy and his step light and elastic as he left the house. He thought over what Nell had told him, and her confidence in him gave him great joy. He valued this far more than the explanation she had volunteered about her family affairs. She trusted him and turned to him for sympathy. Little wonder, then, that his face glowed and his eyes shone with rapture. It was all a new experience to him, and life seemed very pleasant.

He was roused from this reverie by the sound of angry voices. He stopped and listened intently. They were evidently men, quarrelling on the road ahead of him, though he could not distinguish what they were saying. The fact that they were talking so loudly made him feel that they were not there with any evil designs. Nevertheless, he felt that it was just as well to find out what was the trouble, and at the same time remain out of sight.

Along the road ran a hedge of thick bushes, and, keeping well within the dark fringe of these, Douglas slowly advanced. He could hear the talking more plainly now, and ere long he was able to tell that the men were under the influence of liquor. Their voices

were maudlin, and they were wrangling with one another in a somewhat petulant and childish manner.

"I tell ye he is," he heard one say.

"He ain't," another retorted.

"Yes, he is, ye blame fool."

"He ain't."

"Shet up ye'r jawin'," a third ordered. "Ye'r both drunk. Sure he's there. Wasn't he seen goin' into the house?"

"Well, I'll be darned if I'm goin' to wait any longer," the first speaker whined. "I'm tired an' sleepy, an' want to go home. I wish to G—— that Ben would do his own dirty work."

"Ye liked his whiskey well enough, didn't ye?" his companion asked.

"Oh, yes, that's all right, but there wasn't enough of it."

"Too much fer you, though. Why, it's gone to ye'r head, an' has made yer tongue like a mill-clapper. Ye'd better shet ye'r mouth or the guy'll hear ye an' take to his heels before we kin lay hands on him."

"I ain't talkin' any, am I? Watcher growlin' 'bout? I'm goin' home."

"No, ye ain't."

"Yes, I am."

A scuffle followed these words, and Douglas could dimly see the forms of the two men as they rolled and tumbled about on the ground. Then some one pulled them apart and administered a resounding cuff upon their ears.

"Stop fightin', ye fools," was the peremptory order. "De'ye want to spoil the whole show to-night?"

"Who's spoilin' the show?"

"You are."

"I ain't. I want to go home. I'm sick of this business."

"Ye'r not goin' till the guy comes, I tell ye."

"When's he comin'?"

"I don't know."

"He'll stay there till midnight. They always do. I never got home till mornin' when I was courtin', an' Sal wasn't half as sweet as the 'fessor's daughter. Gad, she's a peach!"

"Ye'r no judge of beauty, Tom Fleet," was the retort. "You'd kiss a cow when ye'r drunk, thinkin' she's beautiful."

"I ain't drunk, I tell ye."

"Ye are."

"I ain't; I'm only sleepy an' want to go home."

"Well, ye ain't goin' till the guy comes."

"Then I'm goin' to fetch him."

"Now, ye'r talkin'. That's the stuff, Tom. We'll take him from his lady love. Come on."

"Wait a minute," one of the bunch ordered. "How'll we do it?"

What their plan was Douglas could not tell, for their voices suddenly became low as they made their plans. But it did not matter. He knew that they were after him, and most likely would go to the house and do considerable harm. He must have assistance, and he at once thought of Jake. With him at his side, he felt that the men before him could be mastered, especially in their present condition.

Creeping through the bushes as quietly as possible, he reached the open field and across this he bounded like a greyhound. He knew that every minute was pre-

cious, and the thought of Nell facing those drunken men caused his feet fairly to spurn the grass. Reaching the main road, he tore through the dust, sprang over a ditch, leaped a fence, raced through the orchard and ran plumb into Jake and Empty standing at the back door.

"Great punkins!" Jake exclaimed, recovering from the impact. "What's wrong?"

"Quick, quick!" Douglas panted. "Come at once. Ben's men are after me. They think I'm at the professor's, and they are going to break into the house. Hurry."

"G-g-good Lord" Jake stuttered in amazement. "Let me git me gun!"

"No, no, never mind that; your fists will do. Come."

Without waiting for further parley, Douglas darted away, with Jake and Empty close at his heels. He did not go to the spot where he had left the men but kept off into the middle of the field, and ran down opposite the professor's house. Then turning sharply to the left, he hurried across to the garden and stopped before the row of bushes which ran almost to the shore.

The rescuers were not a moment too soon, for the attackers had already reached the house and were pounding loudly upon the back door. When it presently slowly opened, Douglas could hear Nell's voice anxiously enquiring what was the matter.

"Give us the guy who's here," one of the men demanded.

"Who?" Nell asked in surprise.

"Oh, you know, all right. The feller that's courtin' ye; Jake's man."

Douglas' hands clenched hard together as he listened

hands before her. "It's far better than a picture show, for this is real, isn't it, Nell?"

So unexpected was this view of the situation, that they all laughed except the two men on the floor.

"Ye'r a brick, all right, Nell," Jake remarked. "I like ye'r pluck. Now, some gals would have yelled an' hollered an' tumbled down in a faint. But that's not the way with the gals of this house," and he cast a glance of admiration at Nell.

Douglas had now stepped to Tom's side and was bending over him.

"Get up," he ordered, "and explain the meaning of all this."

Tom slowly obeyed, crawled to his knees and then to his feet. His companion, Pete Rollins, did the same. They presented a sorry spectacle, and Douglas could scarcely repress a smile. But Nan laughed outright when she saw them.

"My, what beauties!" she exclaimed. "This isn't Hallowe'en, Tom. Did you think it was? You'll know better next time, won't you?"

" 'Deed I will, miss," was the emphatic reply. "No more sich doin's fer me, I tell ye that."

Nell in the meantime had procured a basin of water, a wash-cloth and a towel. She now stood before the battered men.

"Sit down, both of you," she quietly ordered. "It won't do for you to go home looking that way."

Meekly they obeyed and sat very still while she washed the blood from their faces.

"It's good of ye, miss," Tom told her. "We don't deserve sich kindness after what we said an' done to

to-night. Some would have kicked us out of the
e an' left us there half dead."

You, fer instance, Nan, eh?" Empty grinned, as he
ed toward the girl.

No, I wouldn't," Nan stoutly protested. "That
uld have been too good for them. I would like to
p them and start a travelling show throughout the
ntry. I would make my fortune in a short time.
ey deserve to be treated like that for disturbing my
aceful slumbers. And just look at that door, all
oken down. Who's going to fix it, I'd like to know?"

"I'll fix it, miss," Pete eagerly replied. "I'll come
o-morrow an' make it as good as new."

"No, you won't. You'll be in jail; that's where
you'll be."

"Hush, hush, Nan," Nell ordered, though she found it hard not to smile at the frightened look which came into Pete's eyes. "Don't mind Nan, Pete. She isn't as terrible as she sounds."

"Yes, she is," Empty insisted. "She kin use her hands as well as her tongue. I know it, fer she's often boxed my ears."

"H'm!" and Nan tossed her head disdainfully. "If you'd been a man I would have done more than that; I would have blackened your eyes, and——"

"There, there, Nan, that will do," Nell interrupted, and from the tone of her voice Nan knew that she must obey. With a sigh of resignation she stood with her eyes fixed upon the floor and her hands clasped before her, unheeding Empty, who was grinning at her on the other side of the room.

"Guess we'd better go now," Tom remarked when Nell had finished her ablutions. "It must be purty

late. But afore I go I wish to ask ye'r pardon, miss," and he turned to Nell as he spoke. "I wasn't jist meself to-night, an' I guess the rest were in the same fix."

"A moment, Tom," and Douglas laid his hand upon his shoulder. "I want you to tell us why you and your companions made this attack to-night."

"To git you, of course. Didn't ye know that?"

"Yes, indeed I did, but I wanted to hear you say so. Now, what did you want to get me for? What harm have I done to you or to the men who were with you?"

"None, none at all. But, ye see, we were under orders. We were told to come."

"Who told you?"

"Ben Stubbles."

"What did he tell you to do?"

"Lay fer ye by the road, an' give ye a thorough hidin'."

"Didn't you feel ashamed to undertake such a cowardly thing as that?"

"We did, an' we refused at first, an' told him that we didn't want to git into any trouble. But he promised that he would stand by an' take the hull blame. When we still refused, he threatened us, an' when that wouldn't work he produced the whiskey."

"Now, will you swear to all this?" Douglas asked.

"Swear! sure I will. I'll swear to them very words anywhere an' at any time. Won't ye, Pete?"

"Ay, ay," was the reply. "I'll swear any old time, an' I feel mighty like swearin' jist now, 'deed I do."

"But what will Ben say?" Douglas asked. "Won't he make it hot for you?"

"Let him make it hot, then," Pete declared. "I

don't have to stay here an' work fer old Stubbles. I kin go somewhere else, an' mebbe it will be jist as well if I do."

"Who were the other men with you to-night besides Pete? It is important that we should have their names."

"D'ye mind if I don't tell ye now, sir?" and Tom lifted his eyes to Douglas' face. "They're all friends of mine, an' I'd hate to squeal on 'em."

"But you didn't mind telling on Ben, did you?"

"Oh, that's different. He ain't a friend of mine, an' never was. He's big feelin' an' mighty, an' has no use fer the likes of me, unless he's got some axe to grind. Oh, no, I don't mind squealin' on the likes of him."

"But we must have the names of the men who were with you to-night," Douglas insisted. "I cannot help whether you like it or not."

"Look, sir, I'll tell ye this: Whenever ye want me an' Pete, we'll be there, an' we'll have the rest with us."

"But perhaps they won't come, what then?"

"Don't ye worry a mite about that. They'll come all right. But supposin' they buck an' won't come, then I'll tell ye their names. I'll give 'em fair warnin', an' if they don't come I'll squeal on 'em then, but not before. Will that do, sir?"

"Yes, I suppose so," Douglas assented. "But don't you fail to come when you're called. We have all these witnesses to what you have said to-night. You may go now."

CHAPTER XXII

COMPELLED TO SERVE

DOUGLAS and his companions stayed for some time after Tom and Pete left. There was much to talk about, and Nell had to go upstairs to explain everything to her father who was greatly agitated over the unusual disturbance. Then, there was the door to be fixed, and it took Jake a full half hour to get it mended.

"There, I guess that will stand fer a while," he commented, as he stood back and viewed his work.

"I thought Pete was going to do it," Douglas remarked.

"Mebbe he would an' mebbe he wouldn't. But most likely he wouldn't. Pete would have promised almost anything jist then. Anyway, the door's fixed, an' I guess it's about time we were gittin' home."

Nell looked tired as they bade her good-night. Douglas knew what a trying day it had been for her, and he admired her courage as she smilingly held out her hand to each one of them.

"I can never thank you for your kindness," she told them. "It is hard to tell what might have happened if you had not arrived when you did."

Douglas cherished the idea that Nell looked at him differently than she did at his companions, and that the clasp of her hand was firmer, and that she let it rest

second longer. He felt sure that he was not
ı, and it brought a thrill to his heart.
e three men made their way through the night,
ɾept emitting occasional exclamations, while
gurgled forth chuckles of delight. Each was
vent in his own way to his feelings over the
of the night. Douglas said nothing, but walked
y by their side. He was thinking over more seri-
ıatters in which Ben Stubbles loomed large and
ɔus. He believed that the struggle between him-
ınd the Stubbles had now reached a crisis, and that
as in a fair way of winning a victory over Ben, at
, if he advanced carefully.
; was past midnight by the time they reached home.
e made Empty come into the house.
'We're goin' to have something to eat,'' he told him,
n' I know you always shine when there's any grub
ɔund.''
Mrs. Jukes was in bed, but it did not take Jake long
light the kitchen fire, boil some water, and prepare
ɔot of tea. This, with bread and jam from the pan-
, formed their midnight repast, and when they were
ough Jake pushed back his chair and lighted his pipe.
'Great punkins!'' he exclaimed, bringing his big fist
wn upon the table with a bang. ''I wouldn't a'
ɜsed that racket to-night fer anything. I wonder
at Ben'll think about it all now.''
'Do you suppose the men will tell him?'' Douglas
:ed.
'Sure. He knows all about it by now, I bet ye'r life.
st likely he was not fer off, the skunk, watchin' the
ll racket. I wish to goodness I'd got the punch on

the lad. "You are somewhat late in delivering it. Is it very important?"

"She wants to know if ye'll be good enough to come an' see her as soon as ye kin, an' bring yer fiddle with ye."

"How is Jean?" Douglas asked. Owing to the excitement of the afternoon and night he had forgotten all about the sick woman.

"Oh, I guess she's jist the same," Empty replied as he scratched the back of his head. "But ma'll tell ye 'bout her better'n I kin. Will ye come?"

"Yes, I suppose I can if she does not want me too soon. Tell your mother that I shall try to get over on Sunday. I am afraid I cannot get there before."

Douglas woke about daylight and heard the rain beating upon the roof. How good it sounded, and he turned over and went to sleep again. It was late when he once more opened his eyes, and sprang out of bed. It was ten o'clock, and he felt ashamed of himself for having slept so long. He apologised to Mrs. Jukes when he entered the kitchen, and told her that she had better send him about his business at once, as he was a most unprofitable servant. But Mrs. Jukes only laughed, and ordered him to sit down to the table and eat his breakfast, which she had kept waiting for him.

"You deserve to sleep all day," she said, "after what you did last night. I have cooked the biggest fresh egg I could find for your breakfast as your reward."

"So Jake has told you all about it, has he?"

"Oh, yes, he told me everything this morning, and he's gone to the store to get me some starch. But he went really to hear the news. He's anxious to know if the word has got abroad, and what people are say-

ing about it. They generally meet at the store when anything of importance is to be talked about. I guess all the men go to get starch," she added with a twinkle in her eyes.

Jake returned from the store before Douglas had finished his breakfast, and laid the package of starch upon the table.

"What's the news this morning?" his wife asked, noting the disappointed look upon his face.

"Nuthin'," was the disgusted reply. "Not a soul in the store but the clerk."

"Isn't that strange?" his wife questioned.

"Naw, not strange when ye come to think it over. Them night prowlers wouldn't say a word; they're too darn scairt an' ashamed of themselves. An' as fer Ben, why he'll be as close as a clam."

"What happened to the daily paper, or the special news agent, I should say?" Douglas asked.

"Who's that?"

"Empty, of course."

"Oh, I fergot him," and Jake laughed. "I guess he overslept himself this mornin'. But he'll be on his job before night, though, never fear."

"Who is the Justice of the Peace in this place?" Douglas asked, as he pushed back his chair from the table.

"Justice of the Peace!" Jake vaguely repeated. "I don't know of any sich person in this parish."

"Yes, you do," his wife replied. "It's 'Squire Hawkins."

"The storekeeper?" Douglas queried.

"The very same."

"Does he ever try cases?"

"Try cases!" and Jake rubbed his unshaven chin, while a smile lurked about the corners of his mouth. "I guess the only cases he tries are the boxes which come into his store."

"But isn't he called upon to decide questions, such as disputes, and other matters which arise in almost every parish?"

"Never heard of him doin' sich things. Si Stubbles does all that."

"Is he a Justice of the Peace?"

"Oh, no, but he looks after sich affairs fer all that, an' settles 'em in his own way."

"And Squire Hawkins is only a J.P. in name, then?"

"That's about it."

"Well, then, it is about time he was getting to work. I shall give him a case this very afternoon. I am going to lay a complaint before him about last night's affair."

"Ye are?" Jake asked in surprise. "I wish ye luck, but I'm afraid ye won't accomplish much."

"Why?"

"H'm, that's easy to explain. Hen Hawkins is under Si Stubbles' thumb. He won't tech the case 'cause he's afraid of Si."

"What has Si to do with it?"

"A great deal, if I'm not mistaken. Him an' Ben are both at the bottom of last night's racket, mark my word. Hen would be scairt most to death to do anything that would uncover their doin's. He'll be afraid of losing' Si's trade. Oh, no, I guess ye won't git very fer with Hen Hawkins, even though he is a J.P."

Douglas said nothing more about the affair just then, though what he had heard made him more determined

than ever. He was learning more and more what a grip Simon Stubbles had over Rixton, and this added to the spirit of adventure which thrilled his soul. Even the Justice of the Peace was forced to bow to Si's authority.

Early that afternoon Douglas went to the store and enquired for Squire Hawkins.

"You will find him at his house," the clerk informed him. "He has not returned from his dinner yet."

Douglas noticed several men in the store who ceased their earnest conversation as he entered. He surmised what they were talking about, as no doubt the news was already abroad. The men listened very attentively as Douglas questioned the clerk, and they watched him curiously.

Douglas had seen the storekeeper on several occasions but had never met him personally. A common farm-hand was beneath the notice of such a man as Squire Hawkins, who prided himself upon his acquaintance with men of money and position. He was a small-sized man, fussy, and pompous to those he considered his inferiors. He did not even show common courtesy as Douglas was shown into the room where he was seated in an easy chair reading the daily paper. He did not even rise to receive his visitor, but in a gruff voice asked him what he wanted.

"You are a Justice of the Peace, so I understand," Douglas began.

"Yes, and what of it?"

As briefly and concisely as possible Douglas stated his case. He told about the two attacks which had been made upon his person, and of the breaking into Professor Strong's house.

"Well, what do you want me to do about it?" Squire Hawkins curtly asked.

"You should know without my telling you," Douglas replied. He was becoming nettled at this man's insolence.

"What, what's that you say?"

"As a Justice of the Peace you must surely know your business. I have told you what has happened, and now I lay a complaint before you against three men, though others are implicated in the matter."

"Why don't you go to Mr. Stubbles? He always settles such matters."

"Mr. Stubbles has nothing to do with this affair. He is not a Justice of the Peace. You are, though, and it is to you I look for justice."

"But I have never handled a case in my life. I don't know what to do."

"Then it is time you began. Why did you accept the office if you know nothing about it?"

"Look here," and the Squire's face became red with anger. "I don't wish for you to dictate to me in that manner. Who are you, anyway?"

"I am John Handyman, working for Jake Jukes at present."

"H'm. And so you expect me to bother my head about you?"

"I certainly do, and what is more, I shall see that you do it, even though I am only a hired man."

Something in Douglas' voice and bearing made an impression upon Squire Hawkins. He squirmed uneasily in his chair and his face grew redder than ever.

"Confound it all!" he growled. "Why do you bother me with this matter? What reason had the men to

attack you? They were only sky-larking, no doubt. Having a bit of fun, most likely."

"Mighty poor fun for me, though, especially when the cudgels fell upon my head. I don't like such fun, and I want you to take steps to stop it in the future."

"Who are the men?" the Squire asked.

"I only know the names of three at present. They are Tom Totten, Pete Rollins and Ben Stubbles."

"Ben Stubbles!" Squire Hawkins exclaimed in surprise. "Surely you don't expect me to take action against him?"

"I certainly do."

"But did he attack you last night?"

"No, not in person, but he was the one who supplied the liquor to the men, and ordered them to waylay and beat me."

Squire Hawkins did not at once reply to these words. He was lost in thought and seemed somewhat worried. His brow knitted, and his small crafty eyes became like two narrow slits.

"I am afraid I can't do anything for you," he at length replied. "It's utterly impossible for me to undertake your case."

"And why not?"

"Oh, there are personal reasons which I do not care to explain."

"Fear of the Stubbles, eh?"

"They are good customers of mine. I would not like to offend them."

"And you are a Justice of the Peace, a man appointed in the King's name to preserve law and order, and yet unwilling to see that justice is done for fear of having

your trade injured." Douglas spoke emphatically, and his words caused Squire Hawkins to wince.

"You have no business to talk to me that way," he roared. "If you are not satisfied with me get somebody else to attend to your affairs."

"Do you mean it?" Douglas asked. "Do I understand you to say that you will have nothing to do with this case, and that I must get some one else?"

"Yes, that's exactly what I mean."

"Very well, then, I shall take you at your word. But remember, I have appealed to you who have been legally appointed by the Crown. You have refused to act in this case. You have refused to see justice done to an innocent man. Do you know what that means? If not, then it is your duty to know. I shall not ask you again to assist me. I am going to the city, and one of the ablest lawyers there is a special friend of mine. I shall place the matter in his hands, and you will be forced to abide by the consequences."

Douglas turned and had almost reached the door when Squire Hawkins leaped suddenly from his chair.

"Wait a minute," he ordered. "I want to have a few more words with you."

"What is the sense of our talking any more?" Douglas asked in reply. "You refuse to conduct this case and what is the use of wasting my time?"

"But perhaps something might be done yet. I feel that I might comply with your request and see this affair through."

"And you will summon those men and try the case yourself?"

"Yes, to the best of my ability."

"Where?"

"In the hall at the Corner, of course."

"When?"

"Will Monday at three o'clock do? That will give me time to serve the summons for the men to appear."

"Yes, that will suit me as well as any time. You must summon the witnesses as well. I shall give you their names. It will be just as well to write them down so as to make no mistake."

Douglas was somewhat surprised at the readiness of Squire Hawkins to comply with his suggestions. He did not know the man or he would not have felt so satisfied. Had he really known what was in his mind, he would have had nothing more to do with him after his first refusal. He was to learn, however, of his mistake later.

CHAPTER XXIII

DISPELLING THE CLOUDS

DURING the night the clouds rolled away, and Sunday morning dawned warm and clear. It was good to be abroad, so Douglas thought, as he walked along the road with his violin under his arm. It would soon be time for the shoe-maker to begin his morning service, and he knew how Joe and his wife would enjoy a little music. He had not seen the former since Friday afternoon, and he was most anxious to learn the outcome of his struggle between right and wrong.

He found Mrs. Benton in the sitting-room, rocking herself to and fro in a splint-bottom chair. Her face was thin and care-worn, and her hair seemed whiter than the last time he had seen her, and he truthfully divined the cause.

Mrs. Benton's face brightened as her visitor entered the room, and she at once offered him a chair.

"It is good of you to come this morning, sir," she told him.

"I did not wish to miss the service," Douglas replied. "I thought you might like me to play a little," and he pointed to the violin which he had placed upon the table.

"I fear there will be no service this morning," and a troubled expression came into Mrs. Benton's eyes as she spoke. "Joe's been very strange of late, and has

not been able to settle down to his work. He can't eat nor sleep, and I am greatly worried about him."

"He is grieving, I suppose."

"Yes, about poor Jean."

"Has he seen her lately?"

"Not since Friday. He may have gone to see her this morning, though, for he left here about half an hour ago, but he didn't tell me where he was going. He seems like a man in a dream."

"He didn't go down the road, Mrs. Benton, or I should have seen him. I was sitting in front of Jake's house reading for some time before I left to come here."

"Oh, he didn't go that way, sir. There is a short-cut across the hills, though it has not been used much of late. The path goes up just in front of our house to the top of the hill, and then turns to the left. Joe took that this morning, though I do not know why, as he has not travelled that way for years. Perhaps he wishes to be alone. I hope he is not going to do anything desperate. He is so down-hearted and strange that I feel terribly worried about him."

"I am going over to Mrs. Dempster's to-day," Douglas replied, "as she sent word for me to come and see her as soon as possible. I might as well go across the hills if you think I can find my way. Perhaps I shall meet your husband."

"That will be very good of you," and Mrs. Benton's face somewhat brightened. "You should have no trouble about finding the way, for as soon as you reach the top of the hill you will obtain a splendid view of the river and the surrounding country. Even if you cannot find any path up there, you ought to be able to see Mrs. Dempster's house off in the distance."

"I shall make out all right, I am sure," Douglas replied, as he rose to go. "I have never been out on the hills, so it will be nice to get the view from the top."

He found the climb a long and tiresome one. The hot sun seemed to strike the hillside with extra intensity, and there was not a breath of wind abroad. Once he sat down under the shade of an old fir tree and mopped his hot face with his handkerchief. Even from here the view of the river was magnificent, and what must it be from the summit?

When at length he gained the top, he stopped and looked around. Then an exclamation of surprise and awe burst from his lips at the entrancing panorama which was thus suddenly presented to his view. Miles and miles of the river, unruffled by a breath of wind, lay glittering in the sunshine. Acres of meadow land, dotted with houses, and broken by tracts of forest, stretched out before him. Peace was upon land and river. It was a magic world upon which he gazed with the ardent soul of a lover of things beautiful and grand.

Having thus rested and revelled in Nature's marvellous handiwork, he turned and looked across the hills toward Mrs. Dempster's house. As he did so his eyes caught sight of a lone figure sitting upon a rock some distance away. Feeling sure that it was the shoemaker, he hurried forward and in a few minutes was by his side. Joe did not seem at all surprised at the young man's presence, although his weary face brightened a little.

"It is a great view from here," Douglas began. "I have never seen anything like it."

"What do you see?" the old man asked.

"Why, the river, and that fine stretch of country to the right and left."

"Yes, I suppose you're right, though I have not noticed them this morning. I have been seeing other things."

"What things?" Douglas enquired, as he sat down upon the rock by Joe's side.

"Jean, of course. My Jean and all her troubles are ever before me. I can see nothing else. How can I?"

"But you should, Mr. Benton. Surely you have not forgotten?"

"Forgotten what?"

"The strength which has been your stay for long years. You remember how sad and dreary was the world yesterday. How dismal everything appeared, with not a glimpse of the blue sky. But look now at all this," and Douglas threw out his hand in an eloquent gesture. "See what a change has taken place in a short time. The greyness is gone, and look how blue is the sky, and how bright and warm the sun. Surely He who is able to effect such a marvellous change in Nature in such a few hours, will not forsake His servant in the hour of need. Cheer up, sir, and do not be so downhearted. Though things seem dark now, yet hope for the best, and trust that the clouds will scatter and the shadows will flee away."

"Your words are full of wisdom," Joe slowly replied, "and you speak like a man who has known trouble. But have you ever experienced a father's sorrow at the loss of a darling child? Can you look back through the years and see that child pure and beautiful, loving and true, making the home ring with her happy laughter and joyous ways? Then at last to see her degraded,

half-demented, a total wreck, with all parental love crushed out of her heart like my Jean over there? Have you known any sorrow like that, young man?"

"No, indeed I have not," Douglas emphatically replied. "Your trouble is truly great. But why give up in despair? Jean is still alive, and she may yet return to her former ways. She is in the depths now, but this Valley of Achor may be to her a door of hope, as it was to the woman we read of in the Bible. Suppose we visit her now, and learn how she is getting along? She may have changed as much since you saw her last as Nature has changed since yesterday."

Douglas rose to his feet and picked up his violin.

"Come," and he laid his hand affectionately upon the old man's shoulder, "let us go together. We may be able to cheer her up a bit."

Without a word Joe rose slowly to his feet and walked along by Douglas' side. Over the hill they moved and then down into the valley below. The path, now worn deep by the feet of cows, for this region was pasture land, wound through a swamp where they had to pick their way owing to the water which settled here. Up a steep bank they scrambled, and when they at last gained the top they came in sight of Mrs. Dempster's house but fifty yards beyond.

The widow was sitting under the shade of an apple tree near the front door, with Empty lying full length upon the ground by her side. They were both somewhat startled and surprised at the sudden appearance of the two men from such an unexpected quarter.

"Well, bless my stars!" Mrs. Dempster exclaimed, rising quickly and giving the shoe-maker her chair. "Ye look fagged out, poor man, an' no wonder fer comin'

over the hills. It's not often any one travels that way now, though John always took that short-cut to the store when he was alive. He was a great man fer short-cuts, was John. I wish Empty here was more like his pa."

"I don't like short-cuts," her son replied. "Ye don't see nuthin', an' ye don't hear nuthin'."

"An' ye can't tell nuthin'," his mother retorted. "That's why ye don't like short-cuts."

"I believe you sent for me, Mrs. Dempster," Douglas remarked. "I was sorry I could not come sooner."

"Oh, there was no special hurry. A day or two doesn't make much difference. But I thought if ye brought ye'r fiddle an' played a little it might cheer the poor lassie up a bit."

"How is she?" Joe eagerly asked, leaning forward so as not to miss a word.

"Doin' as well as kin be expected. She's alone now," and the widow's voice became low. "But I guess it's all fer the best. I wasn't in the least surprised, considerin' what she's gone through. It'll be as much as she kin do to make her own way in life, an' I told her so jist as soon as she was willin' to listen to reason."

"Is she much depressed?" Douglas asked.

"All the time, sir, an' that's what worries me. She broods an' broods, an' sighs an' sighs, poor thing, till my heart aches fer her."

"And nothing will cheer her up?"

"Nuthin' that me an' Empty kin do an' say, so that's the reason why I sent fer you. I thought mebbe a little music might have some effect. I've heard read from the Bible in church that when old King Saul was down in the dumps, an' dear knows he deserved to be, the cloud passed from his mind when David, the shepherd

lad, brought his harp an' played before him. Now, sez I to meself, sez I, 'if that old feller with all his cussedness could be cured in that way, why can't a poor, dear, troubled lassie like Jean Benton?' An' so sez I to Empty, 'Go an' see if that wrestler won't come,' sez I. We've always called ye 'the wrestler,' sir, since ye put Jake Jukes on his back. 'Mebbe he'll bring his fiddle an' play a few old-fashioned tunes to chase the shadder from the poor thing's brain. I hope ye won't mind."

"Not at all," Douglas replied. "I shall be only too pleased to do anything I can. Shall I go into the house?"

"I've been thinkin' that mebbe it would be better to play out of doors. Her winder is open, so if ye'd jist go under the shade of that tree there, she'd hear ye quite plain, but won't be able to see ye. I don't want her to think that the music is fer her special benefit."

Following Mrs. Dempster's directions, Douglas went to the tree and leaning his back against the bole began to play a number of old familiar hymns. It was a peculiar situation in which he thus found himself, and he wondered what the result would be. He had entered enthusiastically into the widow's little plan, and he never played so effectively as he did this morning. He felt that a great deal was at stake, and he must do his best. He recalled how a certain woman had taken him to task when she learned that he played the violin, which she called the "devil's snare" for luring people to destruction. He had tried to reason with the woman, but to no avail. He believed if she knew what a blessing his playing had been to so many people she would really change her mind.

Douglas had been playing for some time when his

attention was attracted by the shoe-maker, who had risen from the chair and was walking toward the house. No sooner had he entered by the back door than Mrs. Dempster followed. Douglas went on with his music, at the same time wondering what was in their minds.

He had not long to wait, however, for presently the widow came to the door and beckoned him to come. He at once obeyed, and crossed over to where she was standing.

"Don't make any noise," she warned, "but foller me. I want to show ye something."

Tiptoeing across the floor, Mrs. Dempster led him to the door of the little room where the invalid was lying. Pausing just at the entrance and looking in, the sight which met his eyes was most impressive. Bending over the bed was Joe with his face close to Jean's, whose arms were clasped about her father's neck. They were both sobbing, though neither uttered a word. Douglas grasped the whole situation in an instant, and turning, he quietly retreated through the kitchen and out of doors. He was at once joined by Mrs. Dempster. Tears were streaming down her cheeks, and Douglas' own eyes were moist.

"What d'ye think of that, now?" the good woman questioned.

"We have no business to be there," was the solemn reply. "That is too sacred a scene for inquisitive eyes. We must leave them alone."

"It was the music which done it, sir; I knew it would."

"Not altogether, Mrs. Dempster. Not altogether."

"Ye think the Good Lord had a hand in it, too?"

"Yes, I have no doubt about it."

CHAPTER XXIV

EMPTY HEARS SOMETHING

IT was past mid-day, and Douglas was about to leave for home when Mrs. Dempster detained him.

"Don't go yit, sir," she told him. "Stop an' have a bite with us. Empty'll feel mighty pleased if ye will. We haven't much for dinner, but ye'r welcome to what we have, an' we'll eat it right under the shade of that big apple tree. We ginerally do that on bright Sundays, fer dear knows we eat often enough in the house."

The widow was greatly pleased when Douglas consented to stay, and at once roused her son to action.

"Hi, thar, Empty," she called, "wake up an' git a hustle on. I want a pail of water, an' then ye kin carry out the dishes. I do believe that boy'd sleep all the time," she grumbled. Nevertheless, she watched him with motherly pride as he slowly rose from the ground, stretched himself and looked around.

"Ain't dinner ready yit, ma?" he asked. "I'm most starved t' death."

"No, it ain't, an' it won't be to-day if ye don't hurry. We've special company fer dinner an' I want ye to behave yerself. If ye do, I'll give ye an extry piece of strawberry shortcake."

Douglas was greatly amused at the conversation and candour of the mother and son. They understood each other perfectly, and were not the least bit abashed at

the presence of strangers. There was no polished veneer about the widow's hospitality. She did not pretend to be what she was not. She knew that she was poor and was not ashamed of it. She was perfectly natural, and indulged in no high-flown airs.

But Mrs. Dempster was a good manager, a capable housekeeper and an excellent cook. The table-cloth she spread upon the grass under the tree was spotless.

"We used this on our weddin' day," she informed Douglas who was watching her. "Dear old Parson Winstead married us in the church, an' then he came over an' had dinner with us. Me an' John had the house all fixed up, an' some of the neighbours helped with the dinner. My, them was great days," and she gave a deep sigh as she stood for a moment looking off across the field. "We was all equal then, jist like one big, happy family, an' good Parson Winstead was to us like a father. But, goodness me! if I keep gassin' this way, dinner'll never be ready," and she hurried off to the kitchen.

When Mrs. Dempster brought Joe from the house he was a greatly changed man. His step was elastic, his head erect and his eyes shone with a new hope. He ate well, too, almost the first he had eaten in several days, so he informed his companions.

It was a pleasant company which gathered under the shade of the old apple tree. Empty had received his second piece of strawberry shortcake, and was satisfied. When dinner was over, he once more stretched himself out upon the ground and resumed the sleep which his mother had disturbed.

During the meal Mrs. Dempster had been flitting to and fro between the house and the apple tree. There

was always something she had to attend to, so she explained when Douglas remonstrated, telling her that she should eat something herself, and never mind the rest. But she would not listen, as she had to look after the fire, get a plateful of doughnuts, and most important of all, to see how the invalid was making out with her dinner.

"The poor dear has eaten more than she has any time since she's been sick," she told them with pride, after one of her visits to the house. "An' there's a little tinge of colour, too, in her white cheeks, an' she really smiled an' thanked me when I took her in her dinner."

"That is encouraging, isn't it?" Douglas asked. Joe said nothing though his eyes never left the widow's face, and he listened almost breathlessly to her slightest word about Jean.

"It is a good sign," Mrs. Dempster replied, as she sat upon the ground and poured for herself a cup of tea. "An' it's another good sign that she wants to see you, sir."

"See me!" Douglas exclaimed in surprise. "Why is that a good sign?"

" 'Cause she hasn't wanted to see any one since she's been sick."

"What does she want to see me for?"

"To thank ye for playin', most likely. She made me tell her who it was, as she was most curious to know. She's takin' an interest in things now, an' that's encouragin'."

When Mrs. Dempster had finished her dinner, she rose to her feet and informed Douglas that she was ready to take him to see Jean.

"You jist make yerself comfortable, Joe, an' I'll be back in a jiffy. Lean aginst that tree an' rest ye'r poor old back. It's always good to have something to lean aginst. Since John died Empty's the only thing I've got to lean aginst, though I must say he's mighty wobbly at times."

Douglas followed Mrs. Dempster into the little bedroom off the kitchen where the invalid girl was lying. He was somewhat startled by the marked contrast between Jean's white face and her jet-black hair which was flowing over the pillow in rich confusion. She smiled as she reached out her thin hand and welcomed the visitor.

"Ye'd better set right down here, sir," Mrs. Dempster advised, as she drew up a chair. "I'm goin' to leave yez to have a nice little chat while I clear up the dinner dishes. It'll do ye a heap of good, won't it, dear?" and she stroked Jean's head. "But ye mustn't talk too much."

Douglas glanced around the little room. It was a cosy place, and the partly-opened window let in the fresh air from the surrounding fields, together with the sound of the twitter of birds and the hum of bees.

"This was my room," the widow explained, "until Jean took possession of it. She wanted to stay right close to me an' wouldn't go to the spare-room off the parlour. I haven't had time to fix it up, an' I've asked Empty time an' time agin to git somethin' to put over that stove-pipe hole in the wall, an' that one in the ceilin'. But my land! ye might as well save ye'r breath as to ask that boy to do anything. But, there now, I must be off."

The good woman's face was beaming as she left the house and went back to the apple tree.

"Where's Empty?" she demanded of Joe, when she discovered that the lad was nowhere to be seen.

"I don't know," was the reply. "He got up just after you left, but I didn't notice where he went."

"That's jist like the boy. He's never around when he's wanted. He does try my patience at times," and the widow gave a deep sigh as she began to gather up the dishes.

In the meantime, Jean and Douglas were engaged in an earnest conversation. It was somewhat constrained at first, but this feeling shortly vanished.

"It was so good of you to play for me," Jean remarked. "I feel better than I have for days. I guess the music has chased the clouds away."

"I am so thankful that I have been able to help you," Douglas replied. "You have had a hard time of late."

"Indeed I have. It seems to me that I have had a terrible dream. Oh, it was horrible."

"You must forget all about that now, and get well as soon as possible."

"Why should I get better? What have I to live for?"

"You must live for your parents' sake, if for nothing else. They have been heart-broken over you."

"I know it, I know it," and Jean placed her hands to her face as if to hide a vision which rose suddenly before her. "But you do not know my past life. You have little idea how I have suffered, both mentally and bodily."

"Perhaps I understand more than you imagine. Any-

way, I know how you looked the night I dragged you out of the water at Long Wharf."

Douglas never forgot the expression which overspread Jean's face as he uttered these words. Her large dark eyes grew wide with amazement and a nameless terror. She clutched the bed-clothes with her tense hands, and made a motion as if to rise.

"Please do not get excited, Miss Benton," he urged. "I would not mention this now, only there is much at stake, and I want your assistance."

"And it was you who saved me?" she gasped.

"Yes, with the help of an old tug-boatman. I saw Ben Stubbles push you off the wharf into the harbour and then leave you to your fate."

"Oh!" It was all that Jean could say, as the terrible memory of that night swept over her.

"Have you seen Ben lately?" Douglas asked.

"Not since the night of the dance at the hall."

"There is good reason why he doesn't come to see you, is there not?"

"Indeed there is," and Jean's eyes flashed with a sudden light of anger. "Nell Strong has taken him from me; that's what she has done. Oh, I'll get even with her yet."

"You are altogether mistaken. Ben is the one to blame. Miss Strong has not wronged you. She dislikes the man, and has refused to have anything more to do with him."

"But why did she meet him night after night by that old tree in front of her home, tell me that?"

"She was afraid of the Stubbles, both father and son. Simon Stubbles has a mortgage on the Strong place, and if she turned Ben away and would not meet

him, the little home would have been taken. Miss Strong has done it now, however, and so I suppose the home will go."

"Are you sure of what you say?" Jean asked in a low voice.

"Yes, I am certain. Ben has been using every effort to win Miss Strong, and he is very angry at me because he imagines that I have turned her against him. The professor and his daughters have been very kind to me, and on several occasions I have been at their house. Once, on my way home, Ben had two men lying in wait for me with clubs. Fortunately, I was able to defend myself, and so escaped serious injury."

"Are you positive it was Ben who set them on?" Jean asked.

"Oh, yes, there is no doubt about it. I found a letter from him in the pocket of the coat of one of the men who attacked me. I have the coat now in my possession as well as the letter. The latter speaks for itself."

"And so Ben did that!" Jean murmured to herself.

"But that is not all, Miss Benton. You have heard, I suppose, what he did Friday night?"

"Yes, Mrs. Dempster has told me all about it. And you think Ben was back of that, too?"

"Indeed he was. The two men we caught said so, and they are to swear to it at the trial, and bring the other men who were with them."

"Will there be a trial?"

"It will be held to-morrow in the hall at the Corner. I am going to put a stop to such attacks and bring the guilty ones to task, if it is at all possible. It is a very strange thing for one family to rule a community like

this, persecute innocent men, and drive them from the parish. It is a mystery to me that the people have permitted it for so long."

"Who will conduct the trial?" Jean enquired.

"Squire Hawkins. He is the only Justice of the Peace here."

"But he won't dare do anything to Ben. He is frightened almost to death of the Stubbles."

"I know he is, and for that reason I want your assistance."

"What can I do?" Jean asked in surprise.

"You can tell what Ben did to you at Long Wharf. That will prove what a villain he really is. Why, he intended to drown you that night, and he would have succeeded if I had not happened to be present. You can make your sworn statement to Squire Hawkins who can come here, so it will not be necessary for you to go to the trial."

Jean buried her face in her hands at these words and remained very silent. Douglas watched her for a few minutes, and a deep pity for this unfortunate woman came into his heart.

"Come," he urged, "won't you back me up? I have entered into this fight and need all the assistance I can get. If I am defeated, no one will dare to undertake such a thing again."

"I can't do it," Jean moaned. "Oh, I can't tell on Ben."

"Why not? He tried to drown you, and he cares for you no longer. He is a menace to the whole community."

"I know it, I know it," the girl sobbed. "But I shall never tell on Ben, no, never."

"But he has ruined your whole life, remember, and he may ruin others as innocent as you were, if he is not stopped. Think of that."

"Haven't I thought of it day and night, until I have been about crazy? But it is no use, I cannot tell on him."

"And are you willing to let him go free that he may do the same villainous things in the future that he has done in the past? A word from you will stir the parish to its very depths. If the people only knew what Ben did to you at Long Wharf that night, they would rise and drive him from the place. If I told what I know they would not believe me. But if you confirm what I say, that will make all the difference."

"Please do not urge me," Jean pleaded. "I cannot do it."

"You must love him still."

"No, I do not love him now," and the girl's voice was low.

"What hinders you, then, from telling?"

"It is the love I had for him in the past. That is one of the sweet memories of my life. Nothing can ever take it from me. No matter what he has done, and no matter what may happen to me, it is something to look back upon those days which are almost sacred to me now. But there, it is no use for me to say anything more. It is difficult for me to explain, and harder, perhaps, for you to understand."

With a deep sigh of weariness, Jean closed her eyes and turned her face on the pillow. Knowing that nothing more could be accomplished, and chiding himself that he had tired her, Douglas rose to go.

"Just a moment, please," Jean said, as she again

opened her eyes. "Are you sure that Nell does not care for Ben? Tell me once more."

"Miss Strong told me so herself," Douglas replied. Then in a few words he related the scene that had taken place in front of the Jukes' house on Friday afternoon. "Doesn't that prove the truth of what I have said?" he asked in conclusion.

"Thank you very much," was the only reply that Jean made, as she again closed her eyes and turned her face toward the wall.

It was about the middle of the afternoon when Empty came out of the house and strolled over to where his mother was sitting alone under the apple tree.

"Where in the world have you been?" she demanded as he approached.

"Asleep," and the boy gave a great yawn and stretched himself.

"Well, I declare! When will ye ever git enough sleep? Ye'll have nuthin' but a sheep's head if ye keep on this way."

Empty made no reply as he sat down upon the ground by his mother's side. He was too happy to take offence at anything she might say. He had heard a great piece of news through the stove-pipe hole in the ceiling of the little bedroom. Empty had a reputation to sustain, and his conscience never troubled him as to how his news was obtained.

CHAPTER XXV

PERVERTING JUSTICE

DOUGLAS did not remain long at Mrs. Dempster's after his conversation with Jean. Bidding the widow and Joe good-bye, he made his way swiftly across the fields by a well-worn path to the main highway. He was anxious to see Nell as she had been much in his mind since the night of the attack. To his joy, he found her sitting alone by the big tree on the shore with a book lying open in her lap. An expression of pleasure overspread her face as she welcomed her visitor, and offered him a chair by her side.

"Father was sitting here," she explained, "but he became unusually sleepy this afternoon, so he is now lying down in the house. Nan is out in the boat with Sadie Parks, a girl friend, gathering water-lilies, so I have been having a quiet time all by myself."

"A most remarkable thing for you, is it not?" Douglas asked, mentally blessing the professor for becoming sleepy, and Nan for going for the lilies.

"It certainly is. It has been a long time since I have not read to father every Sunday afternoon."

It seemed to Douglas as if heaven had suddenly opened to him as he sat there by Nell's side. She looked more beautiful than ever, so he thought, clad in a simple dress of snowy whiteness, open at the throat, exposing a little gold cross, pendant from a

delicate chain fastened around her neck. Her dark, luxuriant hair was brushed carefully back, though a few wayward tresses drifted temptingly over cheek and brow. Her dark sympathetic eyes beamed with interest as Douglas related his experiences of the day, and his conversation with the invalid girl.

"I am so thankful that Jean knows the truth," she quietly remarked when Douglas had finished. "But isn't it terrible what Ben did to her at Long Wharf! I knew he was bad, but I had no idea he would do such a thing as that."

Further private conversation was now out of the question on account of Nan's arrival with her girl friend. She was carrying a large bunch of dripping white water-lilies, which she flung down upon the ground.

"My, what a nice little cosy time you two are having," she exclaimed. "It is too bad that you have to be disturbed."

"It certainly is," Douglas laughingly replied. "We were quite happy here by ourselves. Why didn't you stay longer out on the river?"

"Because I don't like to see people too happy, that is the reason," and Nan flopped herself down upon the ground, and began to weave a wreath of lilies with her deft fingers. "Come, Sadie," she ordered, "you make one, too. My, it's hot! Nell's always cool and never flustered," she continued, as she snapped off a stem and tucked a lily into its proper place.

"It's necessary for some one to be cool," her sister replied. "I do not know what would happen if I didn't try to keep my senses."

Nan merely tossed her head and went on with her

rk. She was certainly a remarkable specimen of ılthy, buoyant girlhood, with face aglow and eyes ırkling with animation. What a subject she would ke for an artist, Douglas mused as he watched her she worked and talked.

'There,'' Nan at length cried, as she held up her ished wreath for inspection. ''Give it to the fairest, ,'' she dramatically demanded.

'The Judgment of Paris, eh?'' Douglas smiled.

'No; your judgment.''

'That would be rather embarrassing, would it not?''

'I dare you to do it,'' and she dangled the wreath :ore him.

'Come, come, Nan,'' Nell chided. ''Don't be fool- . You make Mr. Handyman feel badly.''

'That's just what I want to do. He has neglected , and I want to punish him.''

'Give me the wreath,'' and Douglas stretched out hand.

Rising to his feet, he placed the beautiful lilies upon ll's head, and then stepped back to view the effect. ''There,'' and he turned to Nan, ''I have accepted ır dare, so I hope you are satisfied.''

'You mean thing!'' the girl pouted. ''I don't want ything more to do with you. Come, Sadie, let's for a walk. We're not wanted here.''

''You must not go now, Nan,'' her sister ordered. t will soon be tea time, and I want you to help me. ther will be awake soon.''

The time sped all too quickly for Douglas, and he ndered what would happen before he should spend other such pleasant afternoon with Nell. She did not move the wreath he had placed upon her head until

that evening after he had left her at the cottage door. Then she placed it in a dish of water to keep the lilies fresh as long as possible in memory of that happy day. A strange happiness possessed her, and her heart was full of peace such as she had never before experienced.

Douglas had the feeling that he was now nearing a crisis in his sojourn at Rixton, and the next morning he told Jake that he had better get another man to help him.

"What! Surely ye'r not goin' to leave us, are ye?" Jake exclaimed.

"Not just yet," Douglas informed him. "But I may not be able to give you full service for a while. And, besides, if this trial should go against me, I may be forced to leave the place after all. If Squire Hawkins fails to give justice and allows Ben to go free, what am I to do?" Douglas merely asked this to see what Jake would say.

"So ye think that Hen Hawkins might not give ye justice, eh? Is that what's botherin' ye?"

"Oh, it's not bothering me very much, only it might shorten my stay here, that's all. It will be no use for me to remain in this place with all the people against me. I can go elsewhere."

"The hull people'll not be aginst ye," and Jake brought his big fist down upon the kitchen table with a bang. "Mebbe they'll have a few things to say if Hen Hawkins isn't on the square. I know that him an' the Stubbles eat out of the same trough. But great punkins! they'll dance on the same griddle if they're not keerful."

Douglas was surprised at the number of men gath-

d at the hall when he and Jake arrived that after-
on. Most of them were sitting or standing in little
oups outside, discussing the one important question
the day. Just what they were saying he could not
l, as the time had come for the trial to begin and the
n flocked into the building. Squire Hawkins was
ting on the platform, and by his side was his clerk
h pen and paper before him, ready to take down
evidence.

'Guess the Squire has closed his store this after-
on," Jake whispered to his companion. "He's got
clerk with him to do the writin'."

Douglas noticed that Ben Stubbles was not in the
l, but he saw Tom and Pete with the other men who
l taken part in the attack, sitting in the front seat.
d Ben been summoned? he wondered. He wanted
rascal to be present to hear all that would be said.

The trial was the most peculiar and interesting one
uglas had ever witnessed. Squire Hawkins did not
ow how to conduct the case, but what he lacked in
owledge he made up in words and a pompous man-
. He was feeling his importance on this occasion,
l was determined to make the most of it. Rising to
feet, he stated the charges that had been made
ainst Tom Totten and Pete Rollins. Then he or-
ed the offenders to come forward.

'You have heard the charges made against you, have
u not?" he asked.

'We have," was the reply.

'Are you guilty or not guilty?"

'Guilty, sir."

This candid admission was a surprise to the Squire,
he had expected that the men would emphatically

and ordered to attack me last Friday night. But you have not asked them who the person is who ordered the attack and gave them the whiskey. Is it not right that you should do so, sir, that we may know who was really at the bottom of that cowardly affair?"

"Hear, hear," came from several in the audience. "You are right. Let us know the person's name."

"Your question has no bearing upon this case," Squire Hawkins angrily replied. "These offenders have acknowledged their guilt, and they alone are the responsible ones and must bear the whole blame."

"But why did they attack me?" Douglas asked. "They had no ill will against me; they were merely tools in the hands of another. The one who set them on evidently wished to do me an injury. He is the guilty one, and I demand that you inquire who he is."

"Then you can keep on demanding," was the surly response. "I am conducting this case and not you."

A murmur of disapproval passed through the audience, and several cries of "Shame" were heard. Squire Hawkins was feeling very angry and at the same time uneasy. He was between two fires. He was afraid of the people, and yet he had a greater fear of the Stubbles. As he hesitated, not knowing what to do, Tom Totten cleared his throat and turned partly around.

"If yez want to know who put us on to that nasty job, I'll tell yez," he began. "It was Ben Stubbles who did it. He gave us the whiskey, an' ordered us to waylay Jake Jukes' hired man an' beat him up. That's God's truth, an' we are all ready to swear to it."

During the inquiry Ben had entered the hall and remained near the door. He listened to all that took place with much amusement. He felt perfectly secure

ted to Squire Hawkins to shield him from any
He enjoyed Douglas' apparent defeat when his
was refused. But Tom's voluntary information
rely unexpected. He had never for an instant
that the man would dare make such a state-
His momentary consternation gave way to furi-
r and he at once hurried up the aisle.
; in h—— are you giving us?" he demanded
n. "What do you mean by bringing my name
affair?"
tared in amazement at the irate man before
he could hardly believe his senses. Then his
ed with indignation as he grasped the signifi-
the scoundrel's words.
been givin' the truth, Ben Stubbles," he re-
n' ye know it as well as we do."
lie," and Ben stamped hard upon the floor in
"You were beastly drunk, got into trouble,
lay the blame on me. That's a nice way to
s."
s could hardly control himself at these brazen
Jake, sitting by his side, was wriggling and
g many "Great punkins!" under his breath.
the entire assembly was becoming restless and
r almost anything. But Tom remained re-
calm. He took a step forward and faced the

ear what Ben says, sir," he began, "an' ye've
at we've said. It's six to one, an' we're ready
any time on the Good Book that what we've
s true. Which d'ye believe; him or us?"
quire now was in a worse fix than ever. He
his perspiring forehead with a big handker-

chief and looked helplessly around. He longed for the platform to open and swallow him up. But no such miraculous relief was granted. The issue was before him, and he knew he had to face it.

"I—I think I shall reserve judgment," he stammered, "until I have given this matter due consideration."

"But we want ye to decide now, sir," Tom insisted. "We want to know what ye're goin' to do before we leave the hall. It's six to one, an' any kid could figger that out, without waitin'."

"Hear, hear," came from several in the room.

"But I must have time to think it out carefully," the Squire replied. "You were drunk when you made the attack, and it was easy then for you to imagine almost anything."

"But we weren't drunk, sir, when Ben met us that night, an' gave us the whiskey, an' told us what to do, was we?" and he turned to his companions.

"No, no," came as one from the lined-up men.

As Squire Hawkins' eyes wandered first from the six men to Ben and then back again in an uncertain manner, an idea suddenly flashed into his mind. He grasped it in an instant.

"Look here," he demanded. "I am not dealing with Mr. Benjamin Stubbles now, but with you six men who, according to your own confession, made the attack. If necessary, I can take up his case later. You are the men I have been called upon to try, and not Mr. Stubbles. I, therefore, declare you guilty of waylaying one, John Handyman by name, with the intention of afflicting bodily injury, and also of breaking into Professor Strong's house. These are very serious offences,

is the first time you have been before me I
the penalty very light, and impose the fine
ı dollars upon each of you. That is my de-
I hope you are satisfied."
was upon his feet in an instant.
e perverting justice," he cried. "You know
guilty man and you are letting him go free.
that you give a different judgment, or at
n enough to acknowledge that you are afraid
r decision against Ben Stubbles."
ıear," came from all parts of the room, and
itement that followed, Squire Hawkins de-
trial ended and left the building with Ben
as possible.
was thoroughly disgusted at the farce he had
sed. He was somewhat disheartened as well.
had he of accomplishing anything when the
nted to administer British justice exhib-
. spirit of partiality and cringing cowardice?
ıround him were greatly excited, though he
othing could be expected from them. They
m and rage at the injustice, but they would
ıecks as in the past to the Stubbles' yoke and
ery indignity.
the hall and the babel of voices, he hurried
ıd. The unpolluted air was refreshing and
calmer. Presently an idea flashed into his
h brought a flush to his cheeks and caused his
ndle with a new hope. "Strange I didn't
before," he mused. "But perhaps it is not
et. I shall try it, anyway."

about yourself, and how you have been making out. It's a comfort, anyway, to know that you are alive."

"That's about all, I guess," Douglas replied, as he flicked off the end of his cigar into the ash-tray.

"Have they driven you out?" Garton eagerly questioned.

"It hasn't come to that yet, though attempts have been made to do so. But I fear they will succeed unless you come to my rescue."

"Why, what can I do?" and Garton looked his surprise. "Surely you are not going to get me into any trouble up there!"

"Lawyers generally like trouble, don't they? More trouble, more money, is their motto, so I understand."

"Yes, as a rule. But, you see, this has to do with Church matters, and I like to keep out of them."

"Too little money in the parsons' pockets, eh? Well, I don't blame you. But I want your advice. You told me to come to you whenever I needed help, and here I am. I want it now as never before."

"And you shall have it. Give me your story, and then I shall see what can be done. I hope to goodness you haven't killed anybody."

"Not exactly killed with my hands, though perhaps I have with my heart, which is just as bad, according to Scripture."

As briefly and as concisely as possible Douglas related his experiences at Rixton. He told about his work on the farm, his conflict with the Stubbles, the sorrow of the shoemaker and his wife over their daughter, of Mrs. Dempster and Empty, and the professor and his daughters. He was as cautious as possible when speak-

about Nell, and from his words the lawyer received the slightest idea of his love for her.

Douglas told his story well, and before he was ugh Garton was pacing up and down the study. He unusually excited and at times he found it difficult estrain his feelings.

Good heavens, man!" he exclaimed when Douglas finished, "you've been having a wild west show here. You might have called upon your neighbours e the fun."

I am calling upon one now to see the finish," was laconic reply. "If he doesn't take a hand in the er at once there'll soon be a finish to the chief . You can't do anything when British justice is erted through cowardice and partiality. Simon bles rules the parish, and will continue to rule it in wn way unless he is checked."

And checked he shall be," Garton emphatically re-l, bringing his fist down hard upon the study table. m glad you have come to see me to-night, for your has solved a problem which has been perplexing ll day. Simon Stubbles is on the rocks and has aled to me for help."

On the rocks!" Douglas vaguely repeated.

Yes, on the rocks. He is financially embarrassed, has signalled to me for assistance."

That's news to me. I thought he was very wealthy."

And so did every one. But here is his letter," and lawyer picked it up from the stand. "I received is morning, and in it he tells me that unless he has thousand dollars immediately he will go under. He es to mortgage the whole of his property, mill, e and timber lands."

"This is certainly remarkable news to me," Douglas replied. "I am sure that the people of Rixton have no knowledge of this. They consider him very wealthy, and not without reason for he does a big business. Have you any idea as to the cause of his embarrassment? He seems to live very quietly, and attends strictly to business."

"The letter does not say what it is. But since hearing your story I have formed my own conclusion."

"And what is that?"

"It is his son. From what you have told me, that young man has been leading a very fast life. He does not work at all, and therefore his father must have been providing the money for his headlong career. I do not think I am far astray as cases similar to this have come to my notice. There are too many such young men abroad to-day, doing nothing for themselves, a menace to society, and wretched parasites upon their fathers. I always get furious whenever I think of them. That must be the trouble with Stubbles senior."

"Do you intend to help him?" Douglas asked as calmly as possible. He would have been more than human had he not thrilled at the news he had just heard. Here was a chance, perhaps, to get even for his harsh treatment at Simon Stubbles' hands.

"That is the trouble which has been perplexing me all day," Garton replied. "Before you came I had about made up my mind to do so. I did not know anything about that reckless son of his then. Neither had I any idea that he is such a tyrant at Rixton, nor how he has treated the clergymen who have been there. I thought he was an active and an earnest Church worker,

telling me about it. I invested largely in that concern, and so am greatly interested."

Douglas made no reply to this most gratifying information. His mind had gone back to Rixton and the little cottage by the river-side. He pictured to himself the expression upon Nell's face and the look of joy in her eyes when she heard the good news. How he longed to start right off and tell her. What a relief it would be to her to know that the little place would be saved from Simon Stubbles' grasp, and that all the gnawing financial cares would be ended. It seemed almost too good to be true.

"How much did the professor invest?" Garton at length enquired.

"I do not know. But it must have been quite a sum. Anyway, it was his all, and the failure meant so much to him and his daughters."

"He can sell now at a good profit, as the stock is higher than ever it was before. You can tell him to come to me if he wishes to dispose of his interest."

"I can hardly believe that what you have told me is true," Douglas replied, "as it will mean so much for the Strongs. Simon Stubbles won't be able to worry them any longer."

"Indeed he won't. He's got his own troubles to attend to, and they will be much heavier than they are now, if he isn't careful."

"What do you propose to do? Help him out?"

"That all depends upon you, Stanton."

"Upon me! Why, what can I do?"

"Say the word, and I will refuse to assist him. He can go under, and the parish will be rid of him. Isn't that what you want?"

"I see your point, and I admire you for it. But we must do something."

"Certainly. But let us do nothing hastily. Let me think this over to-night, and we can discuss it again in the morning. You have told me so much that I am anxious to consider every point very carefully. Will that do?"

Further conversation was interrupted by the arrival of Mrs. Garton. She was delighted to see Douglas, and at once began to question him about his adventures at Rixton.

"Let us have a cup of cocoa first, Kit," her husband suggested. "And a piece of your nice cake, too," he added.

"Starving as usual," Mrs. Garton smilingly replied. "Didn't you have your dinner?"

"Why, yes, but it's nearly eleven now, and you promised to be home at ten."

When the cocoa had been made and brought into the study, Mrs. Garton looked quizzically at Douglas.

"If I met you on the street I would not recognise you," she remarked.

"So that's the way you treat your friends, is it?" her husband bantered.

"Oh, I don't mean that, Charles," she protested. "But I never saw Mr. Stanton dressed that way before."

"No wonder you wouldn't recognise me," Douglas smilingly replied. "It is a splendid disguise at times. Even Dr. Rannage didn't know me when he came to Rixton."

"What, were you at that meeting?" Garton asked. "So you heard of it, then?"

"Sure. Why, Dr. Rannage was furious when he came home, and at a recent session of the Board of Missions he expressed his opinion in no uncertain manner, so I understand."

"And he is not over it yet," Mrs. Garton remarked. "I was talking to him for a while to-night, and he told me about his terrible experience up there. He said that it was not a fit place to send any man, and that the people were most ignorant and uncouth."

"They were too much for Dr. Rannage, though," Douglas replied. He then told them in detail about the meeting that night at the Corner. "Dr. Rannage made a fool of himself," he said in conclusion. "He was not the proper person to send there."

"Won't you tell me something about Rixton?" Mrs. Garton asked, "and what you have been doing since you left the city?"

"Tell her about your wrestling bout with Jake Jukes," Garton suggested, "and the widow and her news-bag of a son, and also about the old shoemaker and his wayward daughter. Yes, and about the old professor and his daughters."

"You have given me a big contract," Douglas laughingly replied.

"I know I have, but Kit must hear it."

It was late when the three at last rose to retire. But Douglas did not mind, for he was glad to have such interested listeners. But the part of his story that was nearest his heart he did not tell. Not even to the Gartons would he reveal his love for Nell, and all that she meant to him.

Douglas walked with Garton down the street the next morning toward the lawyer's office.

"Well, what is your decision as to the Stubbles' affair?" the latter asked. "I suppose you have it all cut and dried."

"Not altogether," was the reply. "I spent much of the night thinking it over, but am not fully decided yet. But there is one thing I would like you to do."

"What is that?"

"Come to Rixton and let us both meet Stubbles and have it out with him. What do you think of the idea?"

"It is a good one, and it has been in my mind ever since you told me your story last night."

"When can you come? To-day? I am going back this afternoon."

"I cannot go until to-morrow. I shall go in my auto in the morning and not bother with the train."

"Come right to Jake Jukes' house and I shall get Mrs. Jukes to have dinner ready. I know it will be a good one, so bring your appetite with you. Don't be too late."

"Oh, I'll be on time. When we get through with Stubbles, I want to have a few words with Squire Hawkins. We mustn't let him off too easily."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE

IT had taken the people of Rixton a long time to oppose the overbearing tyranny of Simon Stubbles and his family. It really began that afternoon at the close of the so-called trial. The men were incensed as never before, and talked and threatened in an alarming manner. Even then, nothing of a definite nature might have been done but for the leadership of Jake Jukes. He was slow to arouse to a pitch of fury, but when once stirred he was a formidable opponent, and this all knew. His affection for Douglas was something remarkable, and his wife had at times bantered him about thinking more of his hired help than he did of her. Douglas' courage in facing the Stubbles, combined with his ability as a wrestler, was what appealed to Jake, and when he saw what a miserable farce Squire Hawkins was making of the trial, and listened to Ben Stubbles' blasphemous denial of all connection with the night attack, his anger rose to white heat.

For a while he remained silent at the close of the trial, and merely listened to what the men were saying. He heard all kinds of suggestions and wild talk. Some advocated burning out the Stubbles, mill and house, and driving them from the parish. Others were for horse-whipping Ben and Squire Hawkins, while one went so far as to suggest that they hang Ben to the

limb of a tree. Jake knew that all this talk would amount to nothing without a leader, and if no one else would act, he would. Quickly mounting a bench, he ordered the men to be silent.

"Ye'r all talkin' like a bunch of kids," he chided. "Let's git down to business, an' do something. I don't want this to end in nuthin' but talk as in the past. It's now or never. I'm willin' to lead an' take the hull blame, if yez don't funk on me at the last minute."

"Good fer you, Jake," several shouted. "We'll stand by ye, never fear."

"All right, then," Jake replied, "I'll bank on yez all. But yez better go home now an' think this all over, an' what is more important, keep ye'r tongues still an' don't blab this all over the place. When I want yez, I'll send fer yez, an' not before."

The Stubbles family were at their late breakfast the next morning when news reached them about the indignation meeting in the hall the previous evening. It was Squire Hawkins who told them. He had received the information from an early caller at the store. All the Stubbles considered the affair a huge joke excepting Miss Mehetibel. She was angry and expressed her views in a most caustic manner.

"It's that horrid fiddler," she declared, "who is at the bottom of all this. Pa, I don't understand why you allow him to remain in the parish."

"Oh, he'll be out of the place soon," Stubbles senior replied. "You'll attend to him, Squire, won't you?" and he winked at Hawkins across the room.

The storekeeper grinned in reply. He was greatly pleased at the way he had managed affairs at the trial,

and had no fear of the people so long as he had the Stubbles with him.

"They're all beasts and should be soundly whipped," Miss Mehetibel proclaimed. "Oh, if I were only a man!"

"Cut your hair and change your clothes, Hettie," her brother sarcastically replied, "and you'll pass for a man any time."

"I'd be ashamed to be like you, Ben," was the retort. "You haven't enough spunk to be in the catalogue of men."

"Maybe not, but I get there just the same. What about last night?"

"Oh, that's not ended yet. That indignation meeting may amount to something after all."

"Not a bit of it. It'll all end in talk. Why, the people in this parish haven't the spunk of chickens when a hawk is after them. Dad's the hawk in this case, and they're frightened to death of him. Come, girls, let's go for a spin."

If Ben Stubbles had only known what was really taking place in Rixton he would not have spoken so contemptuously about the people of the parish. The intense feeling which pervaded the community that day was ominous. Neighbours neglected their work as never before, and met in twos and threes near their line fences to discuss the one big question of the day. That they were determined to stand by Jake was most evident, and they impatiently waited for word that would stir them to action.

Their anger was further roused when they learned of what Ben had done to Jean Benton at Long Wharf. This was due to Empty, and the startling news spread

from house to house with mysterious rapidity. No one doubted it for an instant, for Empty himself had heard it from Jean's own lips, and that settled it so far as the people were concerned. It was this which removed the last particle of hesitation in the mind of any one as to the necessity of action. When at last word came from Jake to be ready that night, the men were as one in their grim determination to take matters into their own hands.

The wharf near the store was the stated place of meeting, and there, just after sundown, the men of Rixton gathered. They came in little groups without any noise or clamour. Squire Hawkins, at first, had no idea of their intentions, but thought that they had come merely to meet the evening steamer. But as the crowd increased, he became somewhat uneasy as reports of impending trouble drifted to his ears. In his anxiety, he sent word to Simon Stubbles, telling him of his fears and advising him to come and disperse the men.

It was Ben who received the message just as he was about to head his car through the gate of the driveway leading up to the house. With a curse he swung his car to the right and started up the road toward the wharf. He would attend to the crowd, and send the men about their business. His father could make an example of the ringleaders later. But for once in his life Ben Stubbles had reckoned without his cost. As he drew up near where the men were gathered, he ordered them to clear out and go home.

"I know your plans," he told them, "but what do you think you can do? Don't you know what will happen to you? Have you all gone crazy, you d—— fools?"

The only reply to these words was a roar of anger as the crowd surged toward the car. Ben, seeing them coming, and realising for the first time the seriousness of the situation, endeavoured to escape. But he was too late, for in an instant he was lifted off his feet and placed astride a pole which was carried upon the shoulders of two strong men. Cursing and raving, Ben threw himself to the ground but was immediately hustled back again by a score of rough hands.

"Set still, ye beast, an' stop ye'r wrigglin'," Jake ordered. "Ye'r only gettin' what's comin' to ye. Ye'll git a darn sight more if ye don't keep quiet."

Away from the wharf and the main highway Ben was borne, and across an open meadow to a deep slimy frog-pond on the edge of a large swamp. Here he was dumped unceremoniously upon the ground, and ordered to remove his clothes. When he hesitated and looked helplessly about as if seeking for some avenue of escape, rough hands seized him and in a few minutes he was standing as naked as the moment he was born. Ben's face was now pale and he was trembling in every limb. His cursing and raving had ceased and the cowardly heart of the man showed itself. He pleaded for mercy, and begged his captors to let him go.

"Not till we're through with ye," Jake told him. "Ye've had ye'r own way in this place long enough, an' it's our turn now."

"We'll teach ye a thing or two, ye bloody liar," Tom Totten roared. "Ye'r heart's as black as ink, an' ye'r body'll be jist as black in a few minutes. Bring on the stuff, boys."

At once a pail of coal-tar was produced, and seizing the brush which was handed him, Tom dipped it into

the tar. At the first daub upon his naked body, Ben emitted a yell of despair and made a frantic effort to escape. But he was instantly seized and laid on the ground.

"Ye'd better keep quiet, me hearty," Tom warned, as he rapidly smeared Ben's body from head to foot. "If ye'r not careful I'll do ye'r face an' head at the same time."

While this was taking place, several of the men were ripping open an old feather bed they had brought with them. Into this Ben was plunged, and rolled over and over until he looked more like an unsightly feathered creature than a human being. He was then made to stand on his feet for general inspection. The men shouted with laughter at the ludicrous spectacle he presented, and all kinds of uncomplimentary remarks were made.

"Who's your tailor?" asked one.

"Is that the latest fashion?" questioned another.

Presently Jake raised his hand, and the babel of tongues ceased.

"Now, look here, Ben," he began, "this is a nasty job, I know. But it was comin' to ye, an' it had to be done sooner or later. Ye were altogether too fresh an' there was no livin' in the parish with ye. This is jist a warnin' to you an' all connected with ye, that the men of Rixton won't stand no more tom-foolery. We're going to take things in our own hands after this, an' we're not goin' to allow you nor ye'r father nor anybody else to treat us like a bunch of damn curs. Isn't that so, boys?"

"Hear, hear!" came from all. "Give him hell, Jake."

"An' look here, Ben," he continued, "we've all heard what ye done to Jean Benton at Long Wharf. By

the great jumpin' punkin! I kin hardly keep me hands off ye'r measley body fer doin' that to a woman, an' her nuthin' but a girl. Now we're goin' to give ye a dose of ye'r own medicine, an' as ye dumped Jean into the harbour, you ye'rself can jist flop around in that frog pond, an' see how it feels. Come on, boys."

As Ben was seized and lifted from the ground, he shrieked and begged for mercy.

"Don't drown me! don't drown me!" he yelled. "For God's sake don't——"

His cries were cut short by the water which closed over his head as he went down on his back beneath the leaves, spawn and slime. He came up like a cork, choking and sputtering, and started to wade to the shore as the water was only up to his arm-pits. But as he attempted to scramble out, he was pushed back and forced to stand in his wretched plight for several minutes. At length he was allowed to leave the pond, and with teeth chattering with cold and fear, he was told to dress himself as quickly as possible.

Mud and slime mingling with the drenched feathers and tar made him look more grotesque than ever as he struggled into his clothes.

"Now clear out," Jake ordered, when Ben was at last dressed, "an' thank ye'r stars that we didn't skin ye alive."

Ben waited for no second bidding, but darted away and ran as he had never run in his life, followed by the shouts, jeers and laughter of the crowd.

The men were now in a dangerous mood and ready for any mischief. The fire of pent-up passion had at last burst forth, and the mob spirit was upon them.

"Squire Hawkins," shouted some one. "Let's give him a dose."

"The Squire, the Squire," passed from mouth to mouth. "His turn next."

What would have happened is hard to tell, had not Douglas at that instant stepped forward. His sudden appearance arrested the men, and they at once stopped their clamour to hear what he had to say.

"I wouldn't do anything more to-night, men," he advised. "You are greatly excited now, and if you are not careful you might do something that you will regret. You have taught Ben a severe lesson, and one he thoroughly deserved. But do not lay hands upon a Justice of the Peace. He can be dealt with in another way."

"How?" asked one of the men.

"I have just come from the city," Douglas explained, "where I have been in consultation with one of the ablest lawyers there. He is a special friend of mine, and he will be here to-morrow. He will deal with Squire Hawkins far more effectively than we can."

"Who is he?" several asked.

"Charles Garton, head of the firm of Garton & Tracey. I think you all have heard of him. It was he who rounded up that bunch of Government grafters last year and forced them to disgorge their ill-gotten gains."

"Sure, sure, we know him," was the cry. "Hurrah for Garton! He'll settle with Hen Hawkins all right."

Seeing that his words were having the desired effect and that the crowd was slowly dispersing, Douglas turned to Jake and told him to come home. Without a word the latter obeyed, and together the two crossed

the field to the main road. Once there, Jake's tongue became unloosened.

"Where did ye drop from, John?" he asked. "I didn't know ye was anywhere around."

"I came from the city on the afternoon train, and when your wife told me what was going on, I hurried to the wharf as fast as possible."

"An' did ye see it all?"

"Only the dip in the frog-pond, but I could easily guess the rest."

Douglas did not go home with Jake, but parted from him at the road leading to the professor's house. He wished to see Nell, as he had many things to tell her.

He received a hearty welcome, and felt very much at home as he sat by the professor's side and told him about his visit to the city, and of his return to Rixton just in time to see Ben's plunge into the frog-pond.

Nell's face grew white and a startled expression came into her eyes as Douglas related what the men of the place had done that night. Her concern was not for Ben, but for those responsible for his punishment. She felt sure that Simon Stubbles would take some speedy method of revenge, and that the first object of his attack would be the man sitting near her father. She wished to warn him of his danger. But how could she speak and not reveal her keen interest in his welfare?

"Have you had any supper?" she asked so suddenly that Douglas looked somewhat surprised.

"No, I have not had time to think of eating," he replied.

"Then you must have something right away," and

Nell rose to her feet, glad of an opportunity to be moving about in order to hide her excitement.

Douglas begged her not to mind as he could get a bite when he went home. But Nell would not listen to his protests, and in a short time she brought in a tray containing a fresh, boiled egg, several slices of excellent home-made bread, cake and tea.

This act of thoughtfulness touched Douglas deeply, and the look that he gave Nell brought the colour back to her cheeks and made her very happy. As he ate, he told about his visit to the city, and especially about the evening he had spent with the Gartons. He said nothing, however, about what the lawyer had told him concerning Simon Stubbles' financial difficulties; neither did he say anything about the recovery of the Big Chief mining concern.

It was about ten o'clock when Douglas bade the professor good-night.

"I am anxious to hear how you are getting on with your book," he told him. "But we can have a long talk when I come again."

Nell accompanied Douglas to the front door, and for a while they stood there looking out upon the beautiful night. Then Douglas told her about Simon Stubbles' financial embarrassment, and how he had appealed to Garton for assistance. By the light of the moon he could see Nell's face which, so he thought, was more beautiful than ever, owing to the serious expression depicted upon it. He could not divine the nature of her thoughts, but when he mentioned the good news of the Big Chief mine, she gave a cry of joy, and her face brightened.

"I can hardly believe it is true," and she clasped

her hands before her. "Are you sure there has been no mistake?"

"None at all. Mr. Garton will be here to-morrow, and he will take over your interest in the mine, providing your father agrees."

"Oh, he will agree all right. What a joy it will be to us all," and she turned her grateful eyes toward her companion's face.

It was difficult for Douglas at that moment not to reveal to Nell all that was in his heart. He longed to tell her of his love, to clasp her in his arms, and to claim her as his own. But no, he must wait. He would not speak to her until he had thrown off his disguise. He believed that she cared for him, perhaps loved him. But what would she think if she knew who he really was, and what a deceiver he had been?

These thoughts flashed through his mind with lightning rapidity. He could hardly trust himself to speak, so they both stood there strangely silent.

"I must go now," and Douglas reached out his hand. "I shall see you to-morrow."

As Douglas' hand closed over Nell's he held it for a few seconds, and it was a great joy to him that she did not try to draw it away. Quickly stooping, he touched her hand with his lips, and then without another word he left her and walked rapidly away from the house.

Sometime later, in the solitude of her own room, Nell's lips pressed the spot where the kiss had fallen. Her eyes were bright with a new-found joy, and her face was radiant with the happiness of love.

CHAPTER XXVIII

KNUCKLING UNDER

SIMON STUBBLES was very angry at what had taken place the previous evening. He was troubled, as well, over his financial difficulties, for he knew that if he could not raise the ten thousand dollars he was a ruined man. Even now he was aware that his influence in Rixton was waning, and what would it be if the crash should come? He had dominated the people because of his position and supposed wealth. They had bowed to his slightest will, and had allowed him to rule. But now they were taking matters into their own hands, and had inflicted a most humiliating punishment upon his only son.

Squire Hawkins was in the room with him this morning, and had related in detail what had happened to Ben.

"It is most disgraceful, sir, and you must punish the ringleaders at once," he told him. "That will teach the others a lesson."

"And who are the ringleaders?" Stubbles asked.

"Why, you know, don't you? They are Jake Jukes and Tom Totten; both very dangerous men."

"And who put them up to the job?"

"Did any one?"

"Certainly. It was Jake's hired man; he's the one who did it."

"But he was in the city, so I understand, and didn't get back until the deed was about done."

"H'm," and Stubbles gave a grunt of disgust, "he was the chief mover in the affair, mark my word. I've had my eye on that fellow ever since he came to the place. He's a stirrer up of trouble. I knew it from the first, and did my best to get rid of him, but he defied me and has remained, notwithstanding my orders for him to leave."

"Then it will be necessary to make an example of him, sir," the Squire replied. "Just say the word, and I shall have him brought before me."

At that instant the door-bell rang, and a few seconds later Douglas and Charles Garton were ushered into the room. Both Stubbles and the Squire sprang to their feet when they beheld the very man they had been denouncing. Stubbles was about to launch forth in hot, angry words when his eye rested upon the lawyer. In an instant his manner changed, and, ignoring Douglas, he rushed forward and seized Garton by the hand.

"This is a very pleasant surprise," he cried. "I had no idea that you were in the place. Allow me to introduce my friend, Squire Hawkins."

Though outwardly affable, both Stubbles and the Squire were very uneasy at the arrival of Jake's hired man in company with the ablest lawyer in the city. What does it mean? each asked himself, and anxiously awaited further developments.

"I have come to see you on special business, Mr. Stubbles," the lawyer began, "and as my time is limited, I wish to discuss the matter with you at once."

"Why, certainly," Stubbles returned. "We can be

as private here as anywhere, sir. Your—er—companion can wait for you at the store."

"No, I wish him to stay where he is," Garton replied.

"Do you wish Squire Hawkins to remain, too?" Stubbles anxiously enquired.

"That is for you to decide. It is immaterial to me, at present, whether he goes or stay, though I wish to speak to him later."

"He might as well remain, then," Stubbles replied. "We have been bosom friends for years, and I always take him into my confidence. He is a man to be relied upon."

"I shall come to the point at once, Mr. Stubbles," the lawyer began. "You have written to me telling of your financial difficulties, and asking for a loan of ten thousand dollars."

Squire Harkins stared in amazement at these words. His weak lower jaw dropped, and his mouth flew suddenly open. This was certainly a remarkable revelation.

"But before I go further," the lawyer continued, "I would like to know the cause of your unfortunate situation. It is a great surprise, for you have been doing a big business."

"I know it," and Stubbles' eyes dropped. "I would not be in this position to-day but for my family. My daughters, I regret to say, have not been as careful as they might have been, but my son is really the one who has ruined me. He has spent my money lavishly and extravagantly, and though I have reasoned with him many a time, it was to no avail. I know I have been weak, and the money that should have been used in connection with my business has gone to him. There,

you have my confession, sir," and the unhappy man mopped his forehead with his handkerchief.

"And ten thousand dollars will tide you over the trouble, do you think?" Garton asked.

"I am sure of it."

"And what about your son? Will any of it go to him?"

"Not a cent. I am done with him as far as money matters are concerned. He must look out for himself after this. I have been taught a severe lesson."

"And suppose I do not get the money for you, what then?"

"I am ruined."

"Can you not get it elsewhere?"

"No, not that amount. I have tried and failed. Six thousand was the best any one would do. I hope you can favour me, sir," and Stubbles turned his eyes beseechingly upon the lawyer's face.

"It all depends upon my young friend here," Garton replied, "and that is the reason why I have asked him to remain in the room."

"It depends upon him!" Stubbles exclaimed in astonishment, as he looked toward Douglas. "I do not understand your meaning, sir."

"You know him, then?"

"Yes, I have met him several times. He is Jake Jukes' hired man, so I understand."

"And he is the man you have been persecuting ever since he came to this place. Why was that?"

"There was no persecution, I assure you," Stubbles hotly defended. "He made himself most obnoxious to people in general, and for the welfare of the community I ordered him to leave the parish."

"In what way did he make himself obnoxious?"

"He insulted my son one night at a quiet dance in the hall at the Corner, and broke up the gathering."

"And what was your son doing? How did he behave that night? Did you ever think of that?"

As Stubbles did not reply but dropped his eyes to the floor, Douglas turned upon him.

"It was your son, Ben, who made the trouble that night, Mr. Stubbles," he charged. "He acted more like a beast than a human being, and because I interfered and checked him, he started out to have revenge. And how did he do it? In a manly way? Oh, no. He persuaded you to order me from the place, and when I refused to obey, he set men to waylay me at night along the road. He even gave the men liquor to induce them to carry out his evil designs, and then at the trial he blasphemously denied it all. And you," he added, turning to Squire Hawkins, "allowed British justice to be perverted."

"Are you not afraid to make such a charge as that, young man?" the Squire pompously asked. "Do you not already realise the danger you are in from last night's affair? How can you account for that?"

"Yes, that's what I want to know," Stubbles questioned. "Did you not stir up Jake Jukes and others to set upon my son and treat him in a most shameful manner?"

"I knew nothing at all about it," Douglas explained, "until my arrival from the city last night."

"You lie!" and Stubbles stamped furiously upon the floor. "Do you expect me or any one else to believe such a thing as that?"

"Ask Jake and the rest of the men. They know that I had nothing to do with the affair."

"I wouldn't believe what they said if they swore to it on all the Bibles in the world. They are nothing but a pack of curs, and I'll fix them, see if I don't."

"You will do nothing of the kind, Mr. Stubbles," the lawyer quietly remarked. "If you do, not a cent of money do you get from me."

"Keep your money, then," Stubbles retorted. "I'm not going to be brow-beaten by you or any one else, and especially by a farm-hand. I shall get along somehow, but I will have satisfaction for the injury that was committed last night. Ben is my son, and I am going to stand by him no matter what happens."

"Steady, Mr. Stubbles, steady," the lawyer advised. "You must not talk that way. You are not out of deep water yet."

"I will stay in, then, and you can all go to blazes. You want me to back down and say I have been in the fault. But you've got the wrong bull by the horns this time."

"Am I to understand, then, that you will not need the ten thousand dollars from me?" Garton asked.

"No, not under your conditions. You want me to apologise to him," and he nodded toward Douglas. "If I do, you'll let me have the money. Is that it?"

"Mr.—er—Handyman, can speak for himself," Garton replied.

"I am not thinking so much of myself, Mr. Stubbles," Douglas told him, "as of the parish in general. If you agree not to act like a tyrant in the future and not to meddle in Church matters, and stop persecuting every

clergyman who comes here unless he bows to your slightest wish, then I am satisfied."

"Do you think I am a fool?" Stubbles flung back. "What impudence! Why, I never heard the like of it before! And I won't allow it! You can go, both of you. I'll attend to my own affairs, sink or swim."

Stubbles rose to his feet, signifying that the discussion was at an end.

"So you don't want the money, then?" Garton asked.

"No, and that's the end of it."

"Very well," and the lawyer rubbed his chin in a thoughtful manner, "that's settled. And you intend to prosecute the men who took part in last night's affair?"

"Yes, to the limit of the law, especially that man there," and Stubbles pointed his finger scornfully at Douglas. "He was at the bottom of the trouble, and he shall suffer for it."

"Well, look here, Mr. Stubbles," and Garton rose suddenly to his feet as he spoke, "I warn you that the moment you do that, I shall have your son arrested for attempted murder."

Had Simon Stubbles received a direct blow in the face, he would not have been more surprised than at these words. His eyes bulged in amazement, and he became as pale as death.

"What, what are you saying?" he gasped. "Surely you must be mistaken. Ben, my son! attempted murder!"

"Yes, that was what he did. He pushed a woman over Long Wharf in the city, and left her to her fate. And she would have been drowned but for timely assistance."

"Oh, Lord!" and Stubbles buried his face in his hands. "I knew that Ben was wild, but I had no idea he would do anything like that."

Presently he lifted his eyes to the lawyer's face.

"Are you sure it was Ben?" he asked. "There may have been a mistake. Perhaps it was some one else."

"No, there has been no mistake. It was your son who did it; we have good proof of that."

"And who was the woman? Much depends upon who she is. It may be a case of black-mail."

"It was a girl from your own place, a neighbour of yours, Jean Benton."

With a gurgled groan of abandoned hope, Stubbles sank back and remained huddled in his chair, a pitiable object of misery. The man who had acted the tyrant for years, who hardly knew the meaning of mercy, and had crushed all who opposed him, was now being paid back tenfold. As he had sown, so was he reaping.

"We must go now," the lawyer reminded him, after a few seconds of silence. "But remember, Mr. Stubbles, the instant you lay a charge against Mr. Handyman here, or any of the men who took part in last night's affair, you will know what to expect. And as for you, Mr. Hawkins," and he turned to the Squire, "I shall deal with you later for wilfully perverting justice. You acted with cowardice and partiality at the trial, and you must put up with the consequences."

"Don't do anything, for God's sake!" Hawkins cried, now smitten with a terrible fear. "I will do what you say, but don't take action, I beseech you. It will ruin my business."

This was just what Garton wanted, and an amused

twinkle danced in his eyes. He hesitated, however, for a few seconds as if lost in deep thought.

"Very well, then, Mr. Hawkins," he at length replied, "if you are willing to make a public acknowledgment of your wrong decision, I will take no notice this time. As you know from my record, I am not easily turned aside when I once make up my mind. However, I will make an exception this time, if you obey me at once."

"I will, sir, I certainly will. What shall I do?"

"Write out a plain confession of your wrong decision at the trial and post it on the door of your store, or in some other public place, where all can see it. That is what I demand."

"I shall do it at once, sir," came the low response. It was quite evident that the Squire was feeling keenly his humiliation, but there was nothing else for him to do, as he had a great fear and respect for the lawyer standing before him.

"I am glad you are acting like a sensible man," Garton told him. "It will save you a great deal of trouble. I must hurry away now, as it is getting late."

"Wait a minute, sir," Stubbles ordered, as he lifted his haggard face. "I have heard your instructions to the Squire, now what do you want me to do?"

"Why, I thought you didn't want anything more to do with me," the lawyer exclaimed in surprise.

"Oh, that was before I heard what Ben did at Long Wharf. I have changed my mind in the last few minutes, and see things in a different light. He can look out for himself and fight his own battles after this. It's no use for me to cut off my nose to spite my face. My wife and I will be worse than beggars, and my

laughters will be thrown upon the world helpless, if I ail in business. Extravagance has brought me to this, nd I have been taught a scorching lesson. I need that noney, sir, so go ahead and tell me what I must do. t will mean humiliation in either case, so I might as vell make the best of a nasty job."

Had Douglas been animated merely by the spirit of evenge, he would have been more than satisfied at the utcome of this interview. But it was only justice he vanted, and the assurance that Simon Stubbles and Squire Hawkins would behave themselves in the fu- ure. He felt sure that they would after this severe esson.

"Suppose we let the matter end," he suggested to he lawyer, when Stubbles had acknowledged his de- eat. "If these men are willing to conduct themselves roperly in the future, why not give them another hance? I am satisfied if you are."

"Just as you say," the lawyer indifferently replied, s he glanced at his watch. "It's up to you."

"Well, let it rest at that, then. I don't wish to arry the matter any further. Give Mr. Stubbles the noney, and save him from failure."

At these words Stubbles sprang to his feet, while a ew light of hope gleamed in his eyes.

"And you won't humiliate me?" he asked. "You von't demand a public confession?"

"Not if you agree to our wishes, and I think you un- lerstand now what they are."

"I do, I surely do, and I shall see that they are ful- illed," he cried.

"Let us shake on it, then," and Douglas reached out is hand.

Stubbles seized it, and as he did so tears came into his eyes and rolled down his cheeks. It was the spirit of forgiveness that had moved him and caused his emotion.

"That is good," and Garton smiled approvingly. "I hope I shall never be called to this parish on such a business again."

"You never will," Stubbles emphatically replied. "But come and visit me again, sir, and bring Mr. Handyman with you. I don't think you will find anything amiss then, eh, Hawkins?"

"Sure, sure," the Squire fervently replied, as he held out his hand to bid Garton and Douglas good-bye. "I think that things will be different in Rixton after this."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE CHALLENGE

FOR two days there was intense excitement throughout the entire parish of Rixton. The one great topic of conversation was the punishment Ben Stubbles had received. There was considerable anxiety as well, for those who had taken part in the affair fully expected that Simon Stubbles would hit back hard. Just what he would do, they had no idea, but they realised that it was not his nature to overlook an insult, especially to his only son. It was, therefore, a great relief when the news spread that nothing would be done, and that Simon Stubbles had agreed to allow the matter to rest.

How this information leaked out was never fully known, though it was surmised that Squire Hawkins had given away the secret. Many were the stories in circulation, and the slightest incident was greatly enlarged according to the imagination of the narrator. It was believed that Jake Jukes' hired man had been a detective in disguise, or anyway, a man who had considerable influence. People recalled everything he had said and done since coming to the place. His wrestling powers were freely commented upon, as well as his ability to play the violin. They remembered, too, how he had faced Ben Stubbles at the dance, and had defeated single-handed the men sent to waylay him along the road at night. In short, he became such a mystery to

all, that they began to look upon him as a hero, and ascribed to him wonderful powers, somewhat akin to those bestowed upon heroes of ancient legends. This feeling became intensified owing to Douglas' absence from the parish since the day of Simon Stubbles' humiliation. He had gone with the clever lawyer at a break-neck speed, so it was said, and had not returned.

But after two days the people of Rixton had something else to talk about. It was the grim spectre of war which had suddenly appeared, and sent a chill to every heart. The newspapers were full of it, and told of the clash between France and Germany, and of the base violation of Belgium by the advancing Huns. Then came England's declaration of war, and all knew that Canada, as a part of the British Empire, must fight, too. People were hungry for the least scrap of news, and watched anxiously for the mailman to make his daily appearance. But even then they were not satisfied, and men crowded the wharf, impatiently awaiting the arrival of the evening boat from the city, that they might obtain the latest news. When word came that a Contingent was being formed for overseas service, then all were aware that Canada was getting ready for her part in the titanic conflict.

Professor Strong was greatly excited over the war, and for once he forgot about his beloved book. Intensely patriotic, he wondered why the young men of the parish did not enlist. He longed to be young again, that he might set them the example, and he talked eagerly to his daughters about England's greatness, and related story after story of her mighty deeds in the past. He was familiar, as well, with the scenes of the conflict, for he had once visited Belgium, and

d even been at Liege. The old man wept when he ard how the Germans had captured it, and were eeping down upon Brussels.

'Just wait," he told them, "until the English and French forces meet those devils, and then there ll be a different tale to tell. There will be no goose-tting, mark my word. Oh, if I were only able to !"

Nell was as greatly interested as her father and Nan. t through all the excitement she could not banish uglas from her heart and mind, and she wondered at had become of him. She could not easily forget last time she had seen him in company with the vyer. She recalled how he had turned as the car s whirling him away, and waved his hand to her she watched him from the door. Empty had told later how the two had paid a visit to his mother, d of their brief talk with Jean. The subject of the nversation Empty did not know, and he felt quite stfallen, for his reputation was at stake. But he ed to make up for this lack of knowledge by telling the numerous stories which were in circulation about uglas. Nell listened to them all, though she made comment. But deep in her heart she believed that ere was considerable truth in what she heard. That hn Handyman was some one in disguise, she had agined for some time. She had reasoned it over and er again in her own mind, and had often lain awake night thinking about it. But why had he come to xton? And why should a man with his ability work a farm-hand? If his health had been poor, she could ve somewhat understood it, for she had read of such ses. The more she thought, the more puzzled she be-

came. Anyway, she was sure that he was a good man, and a gentleman, for not once could she remember the slightest discourtesy on his part to any one.

Two weeks had now passed since Douglas left the place. No one had heard a word about him, and Nell at times believed that she would never see him again. That she had met him and had talked with him, seemed almost like a beautiful dream. She lived in the memory of it, and when she had a little spare time to herself she visited the old pine tree, where they had stood and talked on that bright afternoon.

It was on one of these occasions that, instead of remaining by the tree, she strolled along the path they had travelled that day, until she came to the edge of the cleared field. Beyond was the church, standing bare and lonely, so she thought. She recalled how Douglas had spoken about his visit there, and the sad neglect of the building. A desire now came upon her to see it for herself, so, crossing the field, in a few minutes she was at the front door. To her surprise she found it open, and entering, her astonishment was still greater when she saw Joe Benton hard at work cleaning the floor and the seats. Upon the old man's face was an expression of happiness, and his eyes brightened as he paused in his work.

"I'm getting ready for the service," he explained in reply to Nell's question. "There was no one else willing to do it, so I undertook the job."

"But I didn't hear about any service," Nell replied. "When will it be held?"

"Next Sunday. A notice was posted on the store this morning by Simon Stubbles. He got word from the Bishop, so I understand."

"Is the new clergyman coming?" Nell asked, now eatly interested.

"I can't say, miss. It may be the Bishop himself, r all I know. But as this is Friday, there isn't much ne to get things ready. I wonder what the Bishop ould say if he could have seen the church as it was hen I began work. It was certainly disgraceful."

"But who is to play the organ?" Nell enquired. And the hymns should be practised by those who are illing to come into the choir. Is any one attending to at?"

"I am, miss. Si asked me if I would speak to you, id I was going to your house on my way home. I ope you will play, for then I know everything will all right with the music. Just try the organ, and ay a few tunes. It is a long time since I have heard em, and it will help me with my work."

"Not now," Nell smilingly replied. "I am going dust the chancel and the vestry; that is, if you will t me."

"Sure, sure, go ahead. You have as much right here I have. We all have the same privileges in the ather's House, for we are all His children."

Joe had swept the chancel and vestry room, so Nell isted them both with great thoroughness. She was ry happy at this work, just why she could not ex- ain. When she was through, she polished the brass ltar vases, which were much tarnished. Then she ent out of doors and gathered an abundance of wild owers, and going into the vestry she arranged these tistically in the vases. Stepping back, she viewed r handiwork.

"How will they do?" she asked, as Joe just then

looked in at the door. "Don't you think they will suit any one?"

"I should say so," was the enthusiastic reply. "Even the Bishop himself couldn't find any fault with them."

When the flowers had been placed upon the Communion Table, and the last book had been carefully dusted and arranged, Nell sat down at the little organ and began to play. Joe came and sat down in one of the choir seats at the left. Hymn after hymn Nell played, and when she at last stopped, Joe stepped softly to her side.

"Won't you play one more?" he asked. "Just one; it's my favourite."

"Why, certainly. What is it?"

"The Ninety and Nine. It's number seven-seventy-nine. And won't you sing it, miss? I haven't heard it sung for a long time, though I read it most every day."

Having played the air, Nell began to sing, and as her clear, sweet voice welled forth, Joe leaned eagerly forward so as not to miss a word. There were tears in his eyes, but his face was beaming with joy and peace. Nell sang the hymn through, and when she finished and the last throbbing notes of the organ ceased, a sobbing moan drifted up the aisle of the old church. Both Nell and Joe turned quickly around, and to their surprise they saw a woman kneeling upon the floor with her face buried in her hands.

"Jean, my Jean!" Joe cried, as he sprang from his seat, hurried down the aisle and caught his daughter in his arms. Then there was silence, broken only by the sobs of the kneeling girl.

Nell stood near and watched them, uncertain what

to do. She was deeply affected by this scene, and thought it best that the two should be alone. Softly she moved toward the door, and had almost reached it, when Jean sprang after her and caught her by the arm.

"Don't go, Nell," she cried, "until you have forgiven me. Tell me you forgive me," and once more Jean fell upon her knees and seized Nell's hand in hers, and held it with a firm grip.

Stooping, Nell placed her disengaged arm lovingly about the girl's body, and kissed her on the cheek.

"I forgive you all, Jean," she said. "So get up. Why should you kneel to me?"

"And you know? You understand?" Jean asked, lifting up her pale face.

"Yes, I think I know everything, and you have always had my sincere sympathy. But how did you happen to come here?"

"I wanted to see the old church once more, where I used to worship, and was so happy in the years now gone forever. I did not expect to find any one here, and was greatly surprised when I heard you singing. It was that old hymn which affected me so much, and broke me down completely."

"I am so glad that you came just when you did," Nell replied. "You have been in my thoughts day and night, and I knew that you would come to see me some day. You will come, will you not?"

But Jean shook her head and looked longingly around the church, as if taking a final farewell of all the objects which were so dear and familiar to her.

"I am going away," she quietly said, "and may never be back again."

"Don't say that, Jean," her father implored. "Why should you leave us when we want you so much? Your mother's heart is aching for her little girl."

"I know it, I know it, daddy dear. I have been very bad and cruel to you both. But I have something to wipe out, and I shall never rest content until I have done what I can to atone for my past sad mistake in life."

"Where are you going, Jean?" Nell asked.

"I cannot tell you now. But it is a great work to which I am going, and some day you will be proud of me, and so will the people of Rixton. They scorn me now, and they surely have good reason for doing so."

"But, Jean darling, you will tell us where you are going before you leave, will you not?" her father asked. "You will come home first?"

"Yes, I shall go with you now. And in a few days you will all know where I am going, and what I expect to do. Come, daddy, let us go. Good-bye, Nell, I shall see you before I leave."

Taking her father by the arm, she led him from the church, and up the lane leading to the main road. Nell watched them until they had disappeared from view. She then closed the church and hurried across the field, for it was getting late and her father would be waiting for her. But her heart was lighter than it had been for days. Jean was her old self again, and she was so thankful. But she wondered where she was going, and what she was about to do. That it was something noble, she could tell by the expression of hope in Jean's eyes, and the look of animation which had overspread her face as she told about her intended departure.

When Nell reached the church Sunday afternoon, she found a large number of people already there. It had been rumoured that the Bishop was to hold the service, and it was expected that he would speak about the war, and also have something to say concerning the new clergyman who was to come to the parish.

Nell had not been idle since Friday, and Saturday night the first choir practice in months had been held. The members were now all in their places as she entered the church and went at once to the organ. Having arranged her books, she next placed a list of hymns in a hymn book and took it into the vestry room for the clergyman's use. It was a most perfect August afternoon, and through the open vestry came the fresh air laden with perfume of meadow and forest, and the music of birds.

Having placed the book on the little table, Nell looked around the room to see that everything was arranged in its proper place. And as she stood there, an auto swung up and stopped just outside the open door. Glancing quickly around, Nell saw a man in khaki alight from the car, with a small grip in his hand, and step into the vestry. He paused in pleased surprise when he saw who was in the room, and at once held out his hand.

"Oh, I am so glad to see you, Miss Strong," he began. "I did not expect to find you here."

"Mr. Handyman!" Nell gasped, as she allowed her hand to remain in his for a few seconds. "I had no idea of seeing you here to-day. Where is the clergyman?"

"Right here," Douglas smiled. "Don't you understand?"

"You!" and the colour suddenly left Nell's cheeks. It seemed as if she had not heard aright.

"Yes, I am to take the service to-day. Will you for give me?"

Nell stood for a few seconds uncertain what to do or say. Her mind was in a tumult. She had imagined many things as to Douglas' identity, but never once had she suspected him of being a clergyman.

"There are the hymns," she at length told him, steadying her voice as much as possible. "It is service time, and the people are getting impatient."

Without another word she walked out of the vestry. She tried to be calm, but her hands trembled as she began to play, and it appeared to her that all must notice her agitation. Never had the church seemed so hot, and she longed to be away by herself that she might think over the startling discovery.

There was almost a sensation in the church that afternoon when Douglas appeared and gave out the opening hymn. An intense silence ensued, broken only by the sweet organ notes. Very few in the congregation thought of singing, as they were too busy whispering to one another. Jake Jukes stood dumbfounded. He could not believe his eyes, and paid no heed to his wife who kept nudging his arm. Empty's mouth was wide open and his eyes were fairly starting out of his head. His mother, too, was greatly affected, and her hand trembled so much that she could hardly hold her hymn book. Even Joe Benton forgot to follow the words, and gazed intently upon the clergyman.

But the greatest feeling of consternation was in the pew where the Stubbles sat. They were all there except Ben, and the sisters were dressed in their finest.

For once they forgot about their clothes, and stared with undisguised wonder upon the white-robed man before them. Simon Stubbles stood like a statue. It had taken him only an instant to comprehend the whole situation. He knew now why the clergyman had come to Rixton disguised as a farm-hand. It was to spy out the land, and to ascertain what was the trouble in Church matters. Fear and anger were blended as he watched Douglas' every movement, and a deep sigh escaped his lips as he realised his helplessness.

No one slept during the sermon that day. Nell was the only one who did not hear it all. She knew that Douglas was explaining his reasons for coming to Rixton in disguise, and he explained them well. But her mind wandered, and she thought of many things which had happened during the past weeks and which at the time had puzzled her. But now she saw them in a different light. Her attention was arrested as Douglas began to tell why he was not coming to the parish as rector. The war had made the change. He had offered to go to the front as chaplain, and he had been accepted. His friend, Charles Garton, was raising a battalion and men were being called to the Colours. "How many will go from this parish?" he asked in conclusion. "Many of you are of Loyalist descent, so I believe, and you cannot easily forget what your ancestors endured in their devotion to the flag of the clustered crosses. All that the old flag stands for is now at stake, and every one must do his part to keep it floating as proudly as of yore. I now challenge the young men of this parish to enlist as soon as possible, and unite with the battalion which is being formed in the city. If you do, I shall be your chaplain, and a

woman. But a clergyman in disguise! The thought repelled and stung her, even though she knew why he had done it. Henceforth, he would be a changed man, so she believed, hedged about by the dignity and conventions of his position, and no longer the free and companionable John Handyman as she had known him.

As she sat thus and thought, her mind gradually grew calmer, and she became more self-possessed. She even chided herself for feeling so depressed. What was John Handyman to her, anyway? Merely an acquaintance, whom she had known but a few weeks. She really knew nothing about his past life, for he had been most guarded in speaking about himself. Perhaps he was already engaged to some girl, and he may have been with her during his absence from Rixton. She had no guarantee that he loved her, although she believed that he liked to be with her. She recalled how he had held her hand in his and had looked into her eyes in a way that had thrilled her whole being. But no matter where he might go or what he might become, the memory would be ever dear to her. He would never know of her love for him, and the world would not have the slightest suspicion of the deep things of her heart. She would go on her way as in the past, and none would be the wiser.

Nell was now more like her old self, and as people knew her. Her self-reliant and reserved nature had always added a certain dignity to her personal charms. It would, therefore, have been a great surprise to many could they have looked into her heart on this beautiful afternoon and discovered the secret. They would then have found how deep are the real wells of life; that they who feel most keenly say the least, and

that the passionate love of a noble woman is often expressed in simple outward acts of gentleness, mercy and truth.

For about half an hour Nell sat there, although the passing of time never once occurred to her. She might have remained thus for the rest of the afternoon, had she not been suddenly aroused by the sound of approaching footsteps. Glancing around, great was her astonishment and embarrassment to see the very one who was in her thoughts hurrying toward her.

As Nell sprang to her feet, her heart was beating rapidly, and the rich blood mantled her cheeks and brow, making her more charming than ever, so Douglas thought. His face was radiant, and his eyes glowed with the intensity of love. His impulsive nature could brook no further delay, neither did mere formal words of affection fall from his lips. Instead, he stepped quickly forward, caught Nell in his arms, and imprinted a kiss upon her trembling lips.

So great was Nell's surprise at this sudden and audacious act, that she was rendered almost powerless. A joy surpassing words possessed her, and she longed to remain forever in her lover's strong embrace. But in a few seconds, a feeling of maidenly reserve swept over her, and she tore away the encircling arms.

"How dare you do such a thing?" she demanded. But the tone of her voice and the expression in her eyes caused Douglas to laugh with rapturous joy.

"You must get up more fire than that if you expect to frighten me," he told her.

"But how could you? How did you dare without permission?" Nell faltered.

"My heart gave permission; you must blame it.

And, oh, Nell, tell me that you love me," he pleaded. "If you do, then you will forgive everything. Surely your love must respond to mine."

To these passionate words Nell made no reply. She was too greatly overcome to utter a word so sudden and overwhelming had been the change during the last few minutes. Her form trembled from the vehemence of her emotion, and then the tears, which for so long had been restrained, came to her relief, and, sinking upon the ground, she buried her face in her hands and sobbed like a child.

"Nell! Nell!" Douglas cried, dropping by her side, and placing his arms tenderly around her. "What have I done? Have I offended you? Oh, tell me; tell me quick. I didn't mean to make you feel badly. Forgive me; please forgive me!"

"I am only foolish, that is all," was the sobbing reply, as Nell lifted her head and endeavoured to brush away the tears. "I didn't mean to give way like this. But I am weak, and all this is so unexpected."

"And you forgive me? You are not offended?"

In reply, Nell threw her arms impetuously about his neck, and laid her face close to his.

"There is my answer," she whispered. "Are you satisfied now?"

Never had the old pine witnessed such a scene of perfect bliss as that which then took place at its foot. It gave no sign, however, that it saw anything, but kept its secret well. It was in league with the happy lovers, and never babbled its knowledge.

"It was here where I first saw you, Nell," Douglas told her, as they nestled close to each other upon the

sand. "How well I remember that night, and how entranced I was with your playing."

"Don't speak of that time any more," Nell pleaded. "It seems now like a terrible dream. Oh, how that man followed me, and tried to get me in his power."

"But Ben is gone now, darling, and can trouble you no more. It is not likely that he will ever come back to this place. He has been taught a severe lesson, and I trust it will do him good."

"Oh, I hope so," and a tremor shook Nell's body. "I want to forget him and those awful days that are past."

"And you *must* forget, Nell, in the joy of the present. Oh, I can hardly believe it is true that you love me. I was almost frightened out of my wits lest you should refuse me."

"You acted like it, didn't you?" Nell bantered, turning her happy face to his. "Why, you swept down upon me like a cyclone, and had me in your arms before I could utter a word of protest."

"I was afraid, darling; that was the reason. You see, I knew what a shock I gave you when I bounced into the vestry. And then all through the service I was watching you, and noticed how agitated you were. I wanted to speak to you at once when the service was over, but, no, I was captured by the whole congregation and when at last I was able to look around, you were nowhere to be seen. Suspecting that you might be here, I hurried over as fast as I could, and when I beheld you standing by this tree looking a thousand times more lovely than ever, I lost my head completely, and, oh, you know the rest. It was all your fault, darling, and so don't blame me. If you will per-

sist in being so charming, you must put up with the result."

"But was that really the whole reason?" Nell asked. "Wasn't there something else? You said you were afraid, did you not?"

"Now you are cornering me," Douglas laughed. "Yes, I confess I was afraid of the questions you might ask about my strange behaviour in coming to Rixton in disguise. I felt that you were offended, and so great was my love, I was in no mood to have parts of the Catechism hurled at me. Just imagine my standing before you like a child, and being asked, 'What is your name?' and meekly answering, 'Douglas Stanton, ma'm.' Then, 'Who gave you this name?' and I would say that my godfathers and godmothers gave it to me in my baptism. And you would ask me, 'Why are you so ashamed of your name that you take another?' Now, as that is not in the Catechism, it would have been more difficult for me to answer, and so I would have blundered and stumbled and made such a fool of myself that you would have despised me. No, I could not endure that, and so I acted with audacious boldness. You are not sorry, are you?"

"No, I am glad now, although it was a terrible shock to me at first. I had no idea that you loved me so much. Isn't it wonderful!"

"I loved you ever since I first saw you, Nell," and Douglas drew her closer to him. "And I shall love you always. Nothing can separate us now."

"But this war will," was the low response. "You are going away, and I may never see you again. How can I get along without you?"

"Only for a while, darling. I shall come back to you some day, and while we are parted from each other, our love will support us and keep us strong and brave. But I shall not be leaving for several weeks yet, so during that time we can be so happy together."

"I know it, I know it," Nell replied. "But I am so selfish, and now that I am sure of your love I want you with me always. I must remember, though, what so many are sacrificing for the sake of their King and country, and I must be brave, too. I suppose others will be going from this parish. I do not see how the young men can remain behind, especially after your challenge to them to-day."

"I believe a number of them will go at once. Several spoke to me after service and expressed their intention of enlisting."

"I am so glad that the people this afternoon were kind to you, Douglas. How terrible if they had been angry at what you did. It would make it very hard for me when you are away, as I should feel so badly to listen to their severe criticisms."

"You need not worry about that now, Nell. The people are very friendly, and most willing to do all they can to assist the new clergyman who will come here in my stead. I do not know his name, but the Bishop told me that he would be most careful in his choice of a man. Even Simon Stubbles shook hands with me this afternoon, and wished me good luck. Most likely he is delighted to know that I am leaving the place. Anyway, I am certain that he will behave himself after this."

"How I wish I could go, too," Nell remarked, as she

played with her left hand in the yielding sand. "But I am only a woman, and must remain behind."

"You have a noble work to do here, Nell. Your father needs your care, and, besides, the thought of you will cheer and encourage me. And I shall need your prayers as well. I am sure they will help me no matter where I am. But, there, suppose we let the future take care of itself. We have each other now, and we need not worry about troubles that may never come."

"Perhaps it is better," and Nell gave a little sigh. "But I feel selfish in being so very happy. I am thinking of poor Jean. I suppose her love was just as deep as mine, and now she is broken-hearted. I wonder what will become of her? She is going away, so she told me when I saw her in the church on Friday, but she did not say what she is going to do."

"Why, I forgot to tell you," Douglas replied. "The thought of you banished everything else from my mind. Jean is going overseas as a Red Cross nurse."

"As a nurse!" Nell exclaimed.

"Yes. Major Garton, he is that now, you see, took a great interest in her, and when he found that she had graduated as a nurse from the city hospital, he was able to get her the position without any difficulty."

"And did she ask to be allowed to go?"

"Yes, she made application, and begged Garton to do what he could for her. I believe she is quite happy at the thought of going."

"Oh, I am so glad," and Nell clasped her hands before her. "She will have something to live for now, and I know that she will do a noble work."

"So you will have nothing more to worry about now, will you, darling?" and Douglas kissed her again. "Everything has come out all right at last, as it will in the future."

"I have no fears nor troubles now since I have your love," and Nell lifted her shining eyes to his.

"Not even your father and Nan when we tell them of our happiness, eh? Perhaps they may make things uncomfortable for us."

"No, I am not afraid of them," Nell laughingly replied. "Father is very fond of you, and Nan will be delighted when she hears of it."

"And Empty will have a great piece of news to tell, won't he? We must go over to-morrow and get Mrs. Dempster's blessing."

"And dear old Joe's, too. His will be a blessing worth while."

"What about Jake? We must not forget him, and his 'Great punkins!' Why, he'll need a whole field of them to express his astonishment."

They both laughed heartily like two children at the thought of the good-natured farmer. Then Nell rose to her feet.

"My, it is getting late!" she exclaimed, "and what will father say? We must go home at once. We shall have a supper to-night that will be worth while."

Along the sandy beach they made their way. The old pine seemed to stand a little straighter, as if proud of what it had just witnessed. The birds flitted to and fro, and their chirpings sounded like sweet congratulations. Even the branches of the trees along the shore appeared to bend a little lower to bestow their silent

benediction. All the sweet and beautiful things of Nature were in glad attune with the young lovers as they turned their faces toward the unknown future lying golden and mystic in the lap of the years.

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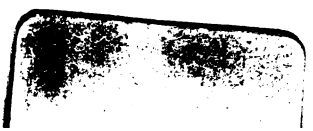
THE END